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NOVA SERIES TOM. XXIII.

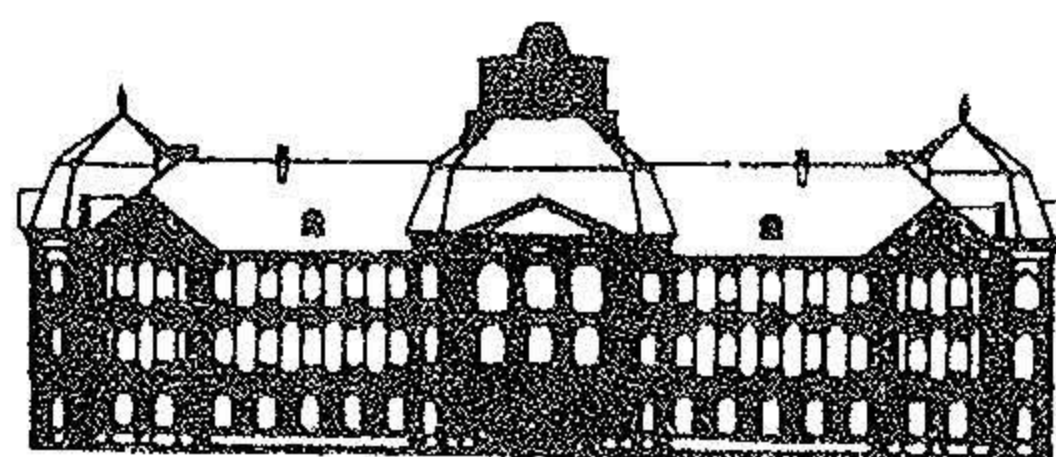
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VOLUME III.

1996

EDITOR: LEHEL VADON



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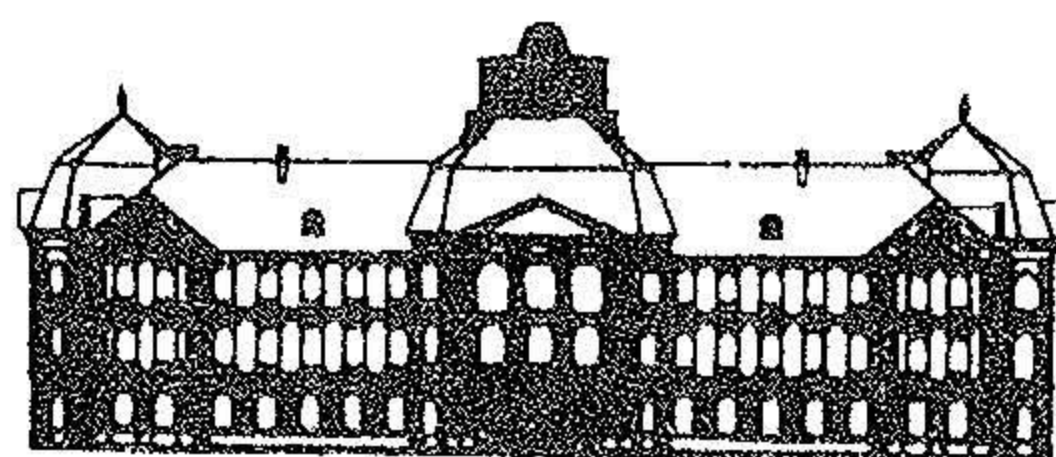
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EDITORIAL NOTE

The Department of American Studies at Károly Eszterházy Teachers' Training College is pleased to present Volume III of the *Eger Journal of American Studies*.

The *Eger Journal of American Studies* is the first scholarly journal published in Hungary devoted solely to the publication of articles investigating and exploring various aspects of American Culture. We intend to cover all major and minor areas of interest ranging from American literature, history, and society to language, popular culture, bibliography etc.

The journal welcomes original articles, essays, and book reviews in English by scholars in Hungary and abroad.

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LÁSZLÓ DÁNYI

DECODING DECODED SYSTEMS: AN
INTERPRETATION OF STEVEN MILLHAUSER'S "IN THE
PENNY ARCADE"

In his *Untying the Text* Robert Young surmises that Roland Barthes' codes of reading operate as "associative fields, a supra-textual organization of notations which impose a certain idea of structure" (Young 134). Barthes distinguishes five codes of reading on the basis of which readers can identify and recognize certain elements in literary works, and can relate them to specific functions. The five codes are the following:

The proairetic code controls the manner in which the reader constructs the plot of a literary work. The hermeneutic code involves problems of interpretation, particularly those questions and answers that are raised at the level of plot. The semic code is related to the textual elements which develop the reader's perception of literary characters. The symbolic code governs the reader's construction of symbolic meanings. The referential code is made up by textual references to cultural phenomena. (Hawthorn 20)

My assumption is that the aforementioned codes can only be differentiated arbitrarily, therefore in a literary work they are interrelated and they constitute different systems depending on the

reader's modes of critical understanding which is "undermined by a family of metaphors to which we continue to cling with obsessive tenacity" (Stevick 192). As implied by the title of my paper, system to me does not mean THE system of a literary work, or a unified system, but the recuperation of the codes mentioned earlier. I definitely try to avoid the word "structure", since it "carries with it connotations of economy, symmetry, accountable proportion, organic form" (199).

My paper aims to analyze and trace the organization of some elements related to particular functions in Steven Millhauser's short story "In the Penny Arcade" which was published in a collection of stories under the same title; and to list Barthes' codes in order to assemble systems of interpretations.

In the title I used the term "decoded systems" because the starting point to me is not the code system as it is but the text, and I do not wish to impose the principles of these codes upon the text but to trace the elements of the story as they appear in the text as the text decodes itself.

1. The proairetic code

The title of the short story seems to determine the setting, the penny arcade, which can be a mysterious place where one can waste his time and money, or a place of wonders for children, or a place which artificially creates and sustains the atmosphere of hope. The greatest attraction of the arcade is that one can buy hopes in there. The title being the first element influencing the reader's attitude to the plot can raise tension by immediately moving into metaphor.

The first sentence contains the division of light and dark, which dominates the whole story. The boy's motion shifts from light into dark by stepping into the arcade and this shift brings about another change which is in the time perspective of the plot. Even in the first two sentences the linear arrangement of events is broken, because the second sentence refers to an event which had happened before the boy entered the arcade. Later on the same method recurs all through the story. Sentences are said in the past tense, and the past perfect tense

alludes to events that happened earlier. Thus the reader is forced to jump to and fro in time if he wants to make out the linear sequence of the plot. From the reader's point of view the textual present comprises the past tense, and the reconstructed past is comprehended through the past perfect.

Still examining the first sentence one could interpret the boy's motion from "August sunshine" into "the shadows of the penny arcade" (Millhauser 135) as the boy's intention to hide away from the heat and relax in the shade, or as the first step, or as the initiative to start the voyage of discovery into the unknown. The word "shadow" implies something mysterious and unknown into which the boy starts his quest, and the plot of the story could be devoted to the obstacles he has to overcome during his voyage, thus at the end of the quest he is expected to achieve the precious aim, or is supposed to develop as a character through his experiences, and to attain a better awareness of his condition. The connotations of certain words also invite the reader into the world of mysteries, "the world seemed hushed and expectant, as if on the verge of revealing an overwhelming secret" (135).

This interpretation could be linked to the aforementioned symbolic code and hermeneutic code as well, and is reinforced by the mother's anxiety. The message of her anxiousness to the reader is that there is something concealed, and her behavior arouses curiosity. Furthermore, her attitude to her son entering the arcade supports the interpretation of the story on the quest motif level, which can even be traced back in time to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, who started their quest for the non-existent Holy Grail.

The failure of this interpretation is that almost any story could be pressed into the quest-motif mould. The quest motif both can and cannot be applied to this story depending on which aspect of the quest motif is emphasized, and on what one thinks the essence of this motif is, if there is such a thing at all. For example, in *Myths and Motifs in Literature* the following definition is provided:

The quest motif stresses less the journeying than the sought-after results of that journey. The goal of the quest is the lost

treasure of innocence, which may be symbolized in various tangible and intangible ways. Ultimately though, the quest hopes to find the self through uniting the conscious with the unconscious. (Burrows 135)

Applying this definition to Millhauser's story would be misleading because the so-called "sought-after result" is of minor importance and the author rather stresses the journey itself, which, again, is by far not the journey of the hero growing into maturity from immaturity. Moreover, the precious aim is negligible because the boy neither serves any precious cause nor seeks anything rewarding, "It was not prizes I had come out of the sun for. It was something else I had come for, something mysterious and elusive that I could scarcely name" (Millhauser 136). The main emphasis falls onto the uneasy process of the search itself, the boy "went off in search of richer adventures" (137).

If there was a well-defined aim the boy was seeking, the reader would concentrate on the aim and not the process. However, obtaining the thing, or achieving the aim would kill the reader's curiosity, uneasiness and the point of the story which is the "wisdom of uncertainty" (Kundera 17). Answers kill questions; certainty is the death of uncertainty, as the sunlight in the arcade is the death of the mystery clinging to darkness.

2. The hermeneutic code

If one conceives plot by defining it as the recollection of events that happen in a story, then one might say that in this story a boy goes into the penny arcade, stays there for a while and comes out through the entrance. The sequence of trivial events like this does not seem to reveal much about the complexity of the text, however, the final act sheds light onto an important aspect of the story. The boy leaves the place through the entrance and not the exit, so the final element of formal structure which is supposed to be the resolution could be the beginning, or the exposition here of another story.

The story offers several traps to those readers who look for a revelation in it. What a relief it is to those readers who want to sort out all the elements of the plot and to make sense of the story, when they come across the following sentence, "All at once I had understood the secret of the penny arcade" (Millhauser 144).

At least two factors could annoy the complacent reader. On the one hand the past perfect tense shows that he had realized why he had had the strange feelings in the penny arcade before he told us the story, so the revelation to him does not come along with the reader's unfolding the secret while reading the story.

On the other hand if one was to unravel the plot in the linear sequence, the boy should have left the arcade through the exit, which would have meant closing the story and having an end to it. Here the exit and the entrance are the one and the same, which underlines both the lack of an end to the story and the way the author combines, welds and melts contrasts together.

The emphasis on the process without the end-result recurs in the story as the boy is thrown into various situations and watches varied activities without experiencing the end. He catches sight of the old fortune-teller but does not want to have her predict anything to him because feeling betrayed he leaves her. Or in another situation he watches a woman struggling with her several layers of clothing, and the description of this scene focuses on depicting the process of taking off the pieces one by one, and before the climax the boy is drawn into another situation, "I felt a melting languor, a feverish melancholy, until I knew that at any moment—'Hey!' I tore my face away. A boy in a yellow T-shirt was shouting at his friend" (143).

The expected achievement of the climax never comes, "I waited for something to happen, for some unspoken promise to be fulfilled, but all at once the movie ended" (139), and the scene again results in disillusionment. The story constantly turns back and repeats its complication without reaching the climax. So the emphasis is laid on the process towards the climax and not on the climax itself.

In one of his essays Philip Stevick compares Jean Stafford's "A Country Love Song" and three new fictions, namely texts by Barthelme, Brautigan and Coover, with the recent past. If I compare Millhauser's story to the criteria provided by Stevick I must surmise that in spite of the novelty which definitely lies in the text more elements of the Millhauser text coincide with the so-called "modernist" Stafford passage than with those of the texts from new fictions.

What are the common elements? Millhauser's story like Stafford's projects the reader "into a world of waiting, expecting" (Stevick 194), and after the first long paragraph the reader is mesmerized. In both stories decay and disintegration are central elements, and the torpor and the blight of the present are juxtaposed to past memories, even to the implication of reminiscent past value judgments which attach certain dignity to the past (195). The shoddy present is often contrasted with the past through the "as if" clause, which "seems to imply that the empirical reality being described is rather bizarre, sufficiently unfamiliar so that some conjectural cause must be supplied to account whimsically for its being so bizarre" (198).

Furthermore, at the end of Millhauser's story the narrator offers an epiphanic insight, a sort of unraveling and unfolding as he claims that he knows the truth and understands the secret of the penny arcade, "For this was the only penny arcade, the true penny arcade. There was no other" (Millhauser 145).

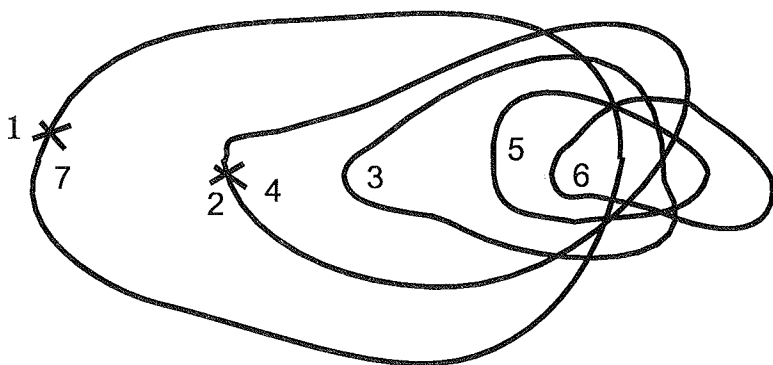
Referring back to the part in which I mentioned the novelty of Millhauser's story, and following Stevick's analysis I conclude that the story bears a lot of common elements with the new fictions as well. While reading the text the reader is in a state of uncertainty from the beginning as the penny arcade itself can be a metaphor with several ramifications. This uncertainty creates tension evoked by the lexical, syntactical and semantical structures generated in the text. Another common element is the way the story centers around the problem of "fascination with the junk of our culture" (Stevick 195).

In Stevick's article another principle of interpreting fiction in two distinct ways comprises approaches to open and closed spaces, or

exteriors and interiors. With regards to this division, the function of the places—like the recesses, the alcoves and the corners the boy wanders about—that appear in Millhauser’s text are much closer to new fiction as “the physical space that encloses the consciousness of the action is undefined, nonspecific, in some vaguely hallucinatory way, or extreme, artificially constricted perhaps, or unaccountably open, or visionary, in which the contours of physical space are heavily shaped by the experiencing mind” (197—198).

3. The semic code

The concept one has about the characters is influenced by the way they appear in the text. The reader meets the twelve-year-old narrator in the first sentence, however, step by step several other layers of narration are revealed. The following chart shows the multi-layered narrative in the light of characters’ perspectives.



The numbers denote the following: the reader (1) immerses into the text in which he learns about the characters. As he is culturally oriented towards the text and he is a different reader at each time of the reading activity, his interpretation of the story differs from time to time, so (7) which is the everchanging interaction between reader and text is an alternating lump. The narrator (2) views the experiences of the twelve-year-old boy at hindsight.

Lump (4) is the narrator's interpretation which is static compared to (7). The twelve-year-old boy's retrospect views (3) cluster around two time levels. On the one hand they comprise events that happened right before entering the penny arcade on his twelfth birthday (5), and on the other hand they contain reminiscences from his earlier experiences (6). Lumps (4), (3), (5) and (6) are static in themselves but they always change within (7).

A subtle shift in the narrative voice expresses the resilience in the narrative voice of the twelve-year-old narrator and that of the narrator when the latter surmises that "for a moment I was tempted by the derrick, but at once despised my childishness and continued on my way" (Millhauser 136). In this sentence the child neglects his childishness, which is more like an utterance by the narrator than by the twelve-year-old boy.

Observing the other characters who are "constructs, types, quite deliberately devoid of much inner life" (Stevick 201) I assume that the clear-cut dividing line between characters and objects is blurred as human qualities and appearances are attached to objects, and human beings also share features common with objects. The two exceptions could be the mother and the father who show some feelings towards the child.

The gamblers inside the arcade form a communion with the machines. At first they seem to have control over the machines, but they are attracted to them with such fanaticism and mania that the controller cannot be separated, or distinguished from the controlled. Their fanatic longing for playing confirms that the machines have power over them. In fact, unlike people, machines appear to be more illuminating and to be full of exhilaration, and people's ennui and disinfatuation are contrasted with the novelty, elation and euphoria of machines, "A tall muscular teenager with a blond crewcut and sullen gray eyes stood bent over a pinball machine that showed luminous Hawaiian girls" (Millhauser 136). This teenager looks and behaves very much like the fake cowboy whose voice is similar to a human being's,

“Suddenly someone began to speak; I looked quickly about, but the voice came from the cowboy’s stomach” (137).

Even machines can act and speak like human beings do, and the world of objects can easily be mistaken for the world of humans, if it is possible to differentiate the two at all. Anything and anybody can fit into the homogeneous mass of objects and humans by becoming “tough, dangerous, and inconspicuous” (136).

The fortune teller, who is supposed to unravel the mysteries of the future and kill the uncertainty which lies in the future, looms against the eye like a fading object, or an obsolete piece of machinery, “A crack showed in the side of her nose. Her one good eye had a vague and vacant look, as if she had misplaced something and could no longer remember what it was” (137). The fortune teller’s and later on the little men’s unconvincingness is further emphasized by their physical isolation from the boy and their placement in glass cases.

Blurring the boundaries between objects and people continues when the boy visits the old machines that have a “melancholy look” (140) and suddenly their weariness pushes life into them. However, this weariness is only a fake imitation of the alertness the boy has in his memory about the machines, “The strange hush, the waking of the creatures from their wooden slumber, seemed dim and uncertain, as if it had taken place long ago” (144).

After accusing the machines of losing their originality and of falling into blight and torpor, the boy reveals that he recognized that he had “become part of the conspiracy of dullness” and he had “betrayed” (145) the penny arcade, so the two short paragraphs at the end of the story introduce a shift in tone. The final implication of the boy’s statement is that in order to appreciate the vividness and liveliness of these machines one needs to be vigilant. The pathetic fallacy in the arcade is that the boy thinks the figures there are rigid and hollow imitations of themselves sunk into hush because he himself is in that mood as well, so he projects his feelings onto them.

4. The symbolic code

I have mentioned the boy's entering and walking in the penny arcade, which could be a symbol of quest which shifts between light and dark. The same idea is expressed in the title of the story. Penny originally meant a silver coin which can stand for something glittering, and arcade is a covered shadowy place which can symbolize darkness. The penny arcade is the place where the two—light and dark—unite. Another implication of penny is insignificant, and by following this meaning the title could refer to place of minor importance. Reading the story one might find sufficient evidence to argue for and against both interpretations.

The visual images of light and dark have their equivalents in space, in time and in feelings, too. The following list is an illustration to this point:

- some words that could be associated with light in the text: summer, sunshine, outside, brilliant, white, wide, sun,
- some words that could be associated with dark in the text: shadows, inside, shade, narrow, black.

This list is compiled from the beginning of the story because later on the simple division into light and dark becomes more complex. The visible, the known and the precise is opposed to the enchanting, the mysterious and the unknown, but Millhauser blends these entities and he does not reject the coexistence of the two groups, i.e. he uses the expression “enigmatic summer” (135), and the narrow sunlight penetrates into the dark arcade.

What darkness in the text does not mean is that it is frightening. Darkness is “enticing” (135) and the boy longs to investigate it, because he thinks that nothing is visible there and he can keep the mystery of the place. He is disappointed when realizing that the darkness inside is not dark enough because some rays of the sun illuminate the arcade. The illusion is destroyed and broken by the sun, and distortions become visible, in N. Sarraute's words, “the fact being, that these states resemble certain phenomena of modern physics which are so delicate and minute that even a ray of light falling on them

disturbs and deforms them" (Sarraute 90). The more realistic and the visible the world is the more deformed and distorted it becomes. As I mentioned it under the proairetic code, shedding light onto something provides the answers to our questions, and as the illusion is killed the mystery cannot be sustained any longer.

In order to preserve mystery the boy seeks a darker corner in the arcade where he discovers all the typical people and objects one might find in a place like that. At a symbolic level some of these objects can have ironic implications. For example the toy derrick which could be a symbol of gambling as a crane, but it might as well mean the symbol of death as a gallows.

If the reader follows the latter line, which can be argued for from the preceding context which is the following,

Tough teenagers with hair slicked back on both sides stood huddled over the pinball machines. In their dangerous hair, rich with violence, I could see the deep lines made by their combs, like knife cuts in wood. I passed a glass case containing a yellow toy derrick..." (Millhauser 136)

Interestingly enough he will conclude that the derrick breaks and kills the childish illusions and dreams a few lines further on when the child despises his childishness.

5. The referential code

The penny arcade which is a place where one lets his hopes be exploited is a part of commercialized culture. The short story recollects all the elements of popular culture which means culture for the people in this case, and then stuffs them into a meatgrinder of the arcade out of which these elements flow like a distorted, confused and annoyingly, or at times funnily mixed mass. In this mass Millhauser establishes a perfect balance between innocence and irony, elation and defeat, sorcery and artifice, novelty and indifference, dream and disappointment, and recoil and wish.

The story is a marvellous and mocking blend of different genres containing elements of gothic stories; of cheap erotic romances; of the legendary strike-it-rich gambling hall culture of the Wild West, which penetrates into urban culture and by doing so it becomes inauthentic expressing the vanishing prospects of the author for creating serious art.

It would certainly be misleading to claim that the aforementioned elements could only be discussed under these five codes, and that there are no overlapping features of the codes. Barthes himself uses references to a variety of different other codes like “the metalinguistic code, the socio-ethnic code, the social code, the narrative code, the scientific code and the scientific deontological code” (Hawthorn 20).

All the ambiguities and ambivalences of the codes are embedded in the language itself, which is intelligible and easily reveals the uneasiness of the content. The language of the text immerses the reader into worlds of dazzling catachrestic visual images (brilliant white ticket booth, sunlight painted onto the dusty air, dangerous hair rich with violence, noble with venomous rancor, radiant with spite, fierce amusement), astounding sound effects (metallic whirrings, clank, clatter, hush, creak), and minutely depicted motions (plunge, prancing, slump, draw, grasp, struggle, huddle, trot, jerk, stagger). Polysemic words (derrick, prize, coiled, varmint, wisp) offer intricate crossroads in interpreting the story.

In the light of the code system this analysis tries to evince that Millhauser’s story does not want to become experimental at all costs, but the elements of the story form a medley of worlds that are not accessible to straightforward imagination. These worlds fuse such seemingly contradictory notions as refinement and distortion, negation and vindication, delight in fluency and transformation to scepticism. The reader is fascinated by that quality of the story which is so wonderfully expressed by the oxymoron “dark glittering” (Millhauser 139).

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BRUCE J. DEGI

BRAIDING THE NEW NATIVE AMERICAN NARRATIVE:
MICHAEL DORRIS' *YELLOW RAFT IN BLUE WATER*

In his introduction to *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century*, noted author and American Indian activist Vine Deloria, Jr., makes the following observation:

There is, admittedly, considerably more to contemporary Indian life than legal and political notions, and it may be that unforeseen cultural changes may create a new climate in which policy considerations can be seen differently. But history tells us that cultural changes of any magnitude follow structural and institutional changes in the manner in which Indians live. The profound cultural changes Indians have experienced in the past century were partially derived from changes in the role and status of tribal governments caused by actions of the United States. Cultural renewal always seems to rush into the vacuum created by new ways of doing things...
(14)

One measure of the cultural changes Deloria mentions most certainly comes through an examination of contemporary native American literature, and especially how it is read by those outside of native American communities. From *Black Elk Speaks*, narrated by Black Elk to researcher John G. Neihardt in 1932, to the Pulitzer Prize

winning *House Made Of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday in 1966, native Americans have found a growing audience for their prose works in twentieth century America. But as important as those works are, it is only recently that Native American fiction is reflecting a genuine change in, as Deloria puts it, the “manner in which Indians live” in the United States. And perhaps the most powerful example of that new direction in native American artistic expression is *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* by Michael Dorris. The power that drives this beautiful and moving novel is its insistence on destroying any possible simple understanding of the central characters through a beautifully realized narrative technique that forces the reader backward in time, continuously surprising and de-centering the reader by forcing a complex revaluation of and change in attitude toward the three generations of female characters. This novel is a clear indication of one specific cultural change within the native American community itself—seeing and accepting the complexity of defining contemporary Indian life—and thus serves as a significant step in changing attitudes toward native Americans by the rest of us.

Without becoming mired in a “chicken and egg” debate—in other words, does the novel—as art—actually mirror changes in society—life—or is it vice versa?—we need simply accept the fact that a significant change in American social history is happening, and that a long awaited “cultural renewal” may now be rushing “into the vacuum created by the new ways of doing things” as the novel suggests. “This is not a story of communities or an attempt at a multifaceted understanding of the web of relationships inevitable in communities,” suggests an unsigned review of the novel in *Western American Literature*, “instead Dorris narrows his perspective to three generations of women in a single, agonizingly fragmented family” (55).

It is, of course, even more fitting then that this tightly focused novel of inter-twined family relationships should be produced by a real-life literary family, a literary marriage, as Michael Dorris (who is a member of the Modoc tribe) and his wife Louise Erdrich (who is part Ojibwa—Chippewa) collaborate extensively on all of the fiction they

produce. The recent novels *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, and *Tracks* carry only Erdrich's name, just as *Yellow Raft* carries only Dorris' name, yet as Erdrich has stated:

We're collaborators, but we're also individual writers. One person sits down and writes the drafts. I sit down and write it by myself or he does, but there's so much more that bears on the crucial moment of writing. You know it, you've talked the plot over, you've discussed the characters. You've really come to some kind of an understanding that you wouldn't have done alone. I really think neither of us would write what we do unless we were together. (qtd in Rouff 85)

Their collaboration is an open secret, even if, as I suspect, it has to this point weighed heavily on Erdrich's talents. But the artistic collaboration within their own family exists, and beautifully mirrors the subtle, yet wonderfully apt, central metaphor in *Yellow Raft*: that of braiding hair. This remarkably simple, and all but mundane act of a mother braiding her daughter's hair (or vice versa)—a personal collaboration in this delicate bit of personal grooming—serves as the novel's soul, and ultimately becomes its message. Thus, in the final paragraph of the novel, Father Hurlburt, the reservation priest, unknowingly establishes the theme that now illuminates everything that has come before in the novel:

"What are you doing?" Father Hurlburt asked.

As a man with cut hair, he did not identify the rhythm of three strands, the whispers of coming and going, of twisting and tying and blending, of catching and of letting go, of braiding. (372)

Father Hurlburt is an outsider, a "man with cut hair," who can not understand the ultimately sociological significance of hair braiding—of twisting and tying and blending and catching and letting go—in the lives of these three Indian women. Thus we see, and the end of the novel, the first issue that the novel confronts: how do non-native Americans begin to understand native Americans? And the second

issue is braided onto the first: how do native Americans begin to understand their own complexity? In working backward through time, in revealing and creating history in reverse, Dorris has already offered his answers.

Nancy Shoemaker, in a "Point of View" essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, provides a useful framework for us to explore the problem Dorris confronts. A Professor of History, Shoemaker relates her continually frustrating problems of trying to teach undergraduate courses in the history of the American West. American students, she points out, are in every case so tied to popular myths about the west in general—and native Americans specifically—that they are absolutely unwilling to hear, much less accept, the historical reality about the settlement of the west. One of the strongest issues she finds is that "most of the students come equipped with the classic stereotypes about Indians, what the historian Robert Berkhofer has called the "Noble Savage" and the "Brutal Savage" (A48). These romantic myths simply refuse to die. Even a so-called sensitive (or is it "politically correct?") film like "Dances With Wolves," Shoemaker points out, ultimately degenerates once again into these same two, simplistic views of native Americans: the Lakotas are the Noble Savages who mystically love the land and accept the converted white man into their midst; the Pawnees, on the other hand, remain the basically naked, apparently homeless, killing machines, or Brutal Savages. "Students still cling to the simplistic image of Indians as Noble Savages," she concludes, "and fail to understand that Indian people are just as complex and varied as white people" (A48). That statement, which should be painfully obvious, but never seems to be, is Dorris' central concern. This continuing problem of comfortable stereotypes, in both life and art, continues to diminish the complexity surrounding native American art, and is exactly what *Yellow Raft* sets out to explode.

An unfortunate lack thus far of serious critical attention to the novel forces our attention here to a brief look at several book reviews which have, like the previously mentioned review in *Western American Literature*, attempted to examine this theme. American reviewers, for

the most part, have generally understood what Dorris is about with the novel. European reviews, interestingly, have not. And the difference is significant.

Publisher's Weekly, for example, sees the fusion of two critical problems in the central character of Rayona, who

like Dorris ... is part Native American—in her case “not black, not Indian”—an outsider who offers a unique perspective on a fringe society. ... Rayona, Christine, and Aunt Ida are mothers and daughters bonded by blood, secrets, a destiny to chart their lives to please or spite their parents, and the strength to transcend grief and despair. ... Dorris vivifies ... the mercurialness and immortality of maternal love. (70)

The review correctly draws a focus in the novel on the complexity of the relationships between the three generations of women, compounded by the fact that they also represent three physically different definitions of the native American community. The mixed-race Rayona (her father is a Black American), unlike Father Hurlburt who can not help being an outsider, initially chooses to be an outsider, but is forced back into the community through the inescapable bonds of maternal braiding—through the inescapable strength of both pain and pleasure found in maternal love through time. The same holds true for her own mother, Christine. The mothers thus create both content and form of the story. “I tell my story the way I remember, the way I want,” (297) says Aunt Ida at the beginning of the final section of the novel. “I use the words that shaped my construction of events as they happened, the words that followed my thought, the words that gave me power. My recollections are not tied to white paper. They have the depth of time” (297). Relationships and identity, both personal and communal, arise from this “depth of time” in the novel. By working the women’s’ history backward, Dorris takes advantage of the inexhaustible “depth” in retelling the history from multiple perspectives. Aunt Ida’s recollections are not tied to “white paper.” Nor are they tied to “white history.” It is

the words themselves, her words—the oral tradition in native American art—that create the history and tell the story.

As a novelist, Michael Dorris embraces Aunt Ida's ability to tell his story—their stories—free of "white history." But, of course, Dorris consciously ties his story to the "white paper." "Nearly a decade ago ... Dorris wrote that 'there is no such thing as 'Native American literature,' though it may yet, someday, come into being ... one of the necessary requisites being a reflection of a shared consciousness, an inherently identifiable world view" (qtd in *Western American Literature* 56). *A Yellow Raft* tells Aunt Ida's story, and Christine's story, and Rayona's story, on Dorris' paper as a reflection of this shared consciousness. A point well noted by yet another American review which concludes that:

Perhaps better than any other form of writing by contemporary Indian authors, the novel has begun to fulfil Dorris' requirement. To a remarkable degree, there is a shared consciousness amongst novels by Indian authors, a consciousness defined primarily by a quest for identity as Indians in contemporary American, that is central to nearly every work by an Indian author. (56)

One traditional aspect of this "shared consciousness" which also dominates *Yellow Raft*, as Anatole Broyard states in his review, "Eccentricity Was All They Could Afford," for the *New York Times*, is that:

Their life is full of images that remind us that the Indian has been "trashed" in our history. When they travel, they pack their stuff in plastic garbage bags. During one of the spells when Christine "loses" her daughter, the way you lose a cat or dog you don't want, Rayona gets a job in a state park spearing litter. (7).

"This is the kind of thing that could scar me for life. I use a phrase I've heard on 'All My Children,'" (15) states Rayona throughout her section of the novel whenever confronted by "trashed" elements of her existence. But the scaring is necessary, if not exactly what we would

expect it to be, for both Rayona and Dorris. Louise Erdrich perhaps explains this concept best in the opening stanza of her poem “Indian Boarding School: The Runaways” from her collection, *Jacklight*:

Home’s the place we head for in our sleep.
Boxcars stumbling north in dreams
don’t wait for us. We catch them on the run,
The rails, old lacerations that we love,
shoot parallel across the face and break
just under Turtle Mountains. Riding scars
you can’t get lost. Home is the place they cross. (11)

All of the scars in *Yellow Raft* ultimately point toward home, toward family, toward the undeniably complexity of human existence—any human existence. “Riding scars you can’t get lost.” “Baudelaire said ‘I’ve seen everything twice,’” adds Broyard, “and most of us see it more often than that—but it looks different each time” (7). By telling, and retelling, and yet again retelling each life story—in a sense doing narrative braiding—Dorris forces us to see the richness of meaning behind the scars of the lives of these women, rather than the scars themselves. We see three human beings rather than a native American community. In effect, then, Dorris uses recognizable stereotypes about native American culture as a way to destroy those stereotypes. “Riding scars you can’t get lost. Home is the place they cross.” Anything else simply leads into the void of cultural simplification which we have all come to expect concerning native Americans. Are we then faced with a “compassionate novel, or a lyrical one” asks Broyard. “These fears are mentioned,” he answers, “merely to be dismissed. The only thing that isn’t first-rate about *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* is its title, which misleads you about what kind of book it is” (7).

Unfortunately, the title may have done just that: misled European reviewers of the novel. London’s *Contemporary Review*, signals the basic problem. “*A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*,” the unsigned review states, “is long, slow, detailed and very American in style and concept. It may open up a new world to readers not familiar with life among

Indians in the Montana Indian Reservation” (216). The review is as stereotyped as the assumption it makes about the novel. Nothing in this novel is designed to “open a new world” for those readers who want to know all the sordid details—the scars—about life on a contemporary reservation. Expectations about the nature of native American fiction are apparently still held as firmly as the expectations about native American culture. And it gets worse. Peter Parker, writing for *The Listener*, (again from London) claims that “the extent which the Red Man has succumbed to the American Dream may be gauged from this novel” (28). Apparently, that notion about native Americans is held so strongly by Parker that he could easily make the assertion before even reading the novel. Or, perhaps, instead of reading it. In fact, the long cherished notion that all artistic expressions by native Americans, about native Americans would, as a matter of course, center upon the mistreatment of the Noble Savage by American society, seems alive and well throughout his review. Parker ultimately concludes that:

The plot has a certain perfunctory interest, but by far the most absorbing thing about this book is the black picture it paints of a dispossessed people and a despoiled culture. ... Unfortunately Dorris fails to exploit the central irony that his story is about inheritance, but with every page we see how the characters’ own heritage has been eroded. In spite of some fancy (rather than fine) writing, this is an ugly and depressing book, unredeemed by passion, in which the characters remain curiously unlikeable, evoking pity but no affection. (28)

It is hard to imagine a reading of the novel that could be more *incorrect* in every aspect. In one of the novel’s unforgettable moments, Christine joins a “video rental club,” whose membership lasts “for as long as you live” (19). Renting two videos (including the movie “Christine” about a car that murders people: “I am Christine. I am pure evil”), Christine rebuffs Rayona’s concern about taking them with them out of the state to Montana. “They won’t be stolen,” Christine explains, “They’ll be rented for life. It’s completely legal. You just have to read

the contract the right way" (23). It is apparently still much too easy not to read *Yellow Raft* "the right way." Dorris does not write about a "disposed people" or their "despoiled culture." Yet that anticipated "truth" about native Americans apparently overshadows every part of the novel for many reviewers. Simplicity once again wins out over complexity; change is easier to resist than to accept. Pity here remains the accepted emotional response to any native American narrative. The most unfortunate characteristic of this "pre-packaged" response to the novel diminishes not only the text, but the people in and behind the novel. Nancy Shoemaker mentions that she has learned to refer

to everyone in the past as "they." Even my use of "they" risks defining Indians as "others" pushed into the background of the story. But when students say "we" and "they" these seemingly innocuous pronouns become laden with connotations of inclusion and exclusion. When students use "we," it is not clear who else is in the category with them. ... White students seem to conflate "we whites" with "we Americans" which pushes Indians even further out of the classroom, all the way out of America. I have tried to discuss the use of pronouns with students, but the lesson does not last for long. (A48)

As these British reviews suggest, the problem is sadly not limited to American students. Parker's review, with its "we" see how "they" live underpinning represents the extent to which this problem continues to be universal. *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* is the strongest attack to date on archaic notions of native Americans. It is sadly obvious that it is just the beginning of a long struggle to come.

Sharon O'Brien, in "Federal Indian Policies and the International Protection of Human Rights," raises a final point: the UNESCO Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation, Article One, states that "in their rich variety and diversity, and in the reciprocal influences they exert on one another, all cultures form part of the common heritage belonging to all mankind" (Deloria 53). By

refusing to see that individual people together make a culture, American society has long

produced governmental policies and programs that divided communal tribal lands, forcibly placed children in boarding schools and forbade them to speak their Indian languages, and sought to destroy traditional Indian religions. ... Now, however, government policies no longer aim to eradicate Indian culture. Whether they are adequately designed to preserve and encourage the development of Indian culture remains an open question. (Deloria 53—4)

And this “open question” surely includes literature by and about native Americans. Just as Alice Walker seeks to destroy stereotypes of gender and identity concerning black American women in *The Color Purple*, Michael Dorris—and Louise Erdrich—through the complexity of their characters, separate yet ever braided together, seek to dismantle the myths about the noble or brutal savage in American life. Understanding the individual is the first step toward change for everyone, inside and outside native American culture. “Cultural changes,” as Deloria mentioned, “of any magnitude follow structural changes and institutional changes in the manner in which Indians live.” And thus write.

Early in the novel, Rayona, having run away from home, encounters the following sign in a state park: “Attention hikers! If lost, stay where you are. Don’t panic. You will be found.’ I take the advice. I stay, I don’t, and, before long, I am” (65—6). Perhaps with the publication of *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, the same can finally be said for the native American author.

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TIBOR GLANT

THE ROLE OF CALVINISM IN PRESIDENT WILSON'S
RELATIONSHIP TO HUNGARY DURING
WORLD WAR I.¹

With a large number of contradictory interpretations of his personality and policies and with many American historians jealously guarding his image as the New World's last moral idealist, Thomas Woodrow Wilson remains difficult to understand.² What all accounts of Wilson's life and policies share, though, is the emphasis on his Calvinism. Wilson's stern belief in his own chosenness reinforced his belief in America being a model for the rest of the world, and the two together came to be the guiding principles of his wartime policies.

¹ The following essay is a revised version of the author's lecture at the 28th Duquesne History Forum, held in Pittsburgh, 20—22 October 1994. The author would like to express his gratitude to Prof. Peter Pastor of Montclair State University, MD, for his useful comments on the paper, and Prof. Steven Béla Várdy and the Rev. Aladár Komjáthy, both of Duquesne University, for the invitation to the conference.

² Literally, hundreds of books have been written about Wilson. To name but a few of the most important ones: William E. Dodd, *Woodrow Wilson and His Work*. (New York, 1920); August Hecksher, *Woodrow Wilson. A Biography*. (New York, 1991); Thomas J. Knock, *The War to End All Wars. Woodrow Wilson and the Search for a New World Order*. (New York and Oxford, 1992); Norman Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics. America's Response to War and Revolution*. (New York, 1968); Arthur Stanley Link, *Wilson*. 5 vols. (Princeton, 1947—65); Arthur Walworth, *Woodrow Wilson*. 2 vols. (New York, 1958).

During the World War Wilson tried to act as the bringer of peace first as mediator then through military intervention. When in April 1917 he defined the global conflict as a struggle between the forces of good and evil and asked Congress to declare war on Germany it became clear that he was ready and willing to lead his country even into an armed conflict to establish the US as *primus inter pares* in a new world order.

That Calvinism played an all-important role in shaping Wilson's moral universe and foreign policies—the American historian Arthur Stanley Link defined the latter as 'missionary diplomacy'³—must be attributed to the influence of his father, the Presbyterian Minister Joseph Ruggles Wilson. Although the subject of a sometimes overheated debate, this father-son relationship, as well as Wilson's childhood inhibitions and failures, are generally understood to have shaped his unshakable belief in his own chosenness.⁴

In sharp contrast with the extensive coverage of Wilson's Calvinism, his Hungarian policies, especially before and during the World War, have largely been neglected by historians. Subsequently, such assessments are based upon speculation⁵ and have yielded two strange misconceptions. First, Wilson's 1912 statement that he was an expert on Austro-Hungarian affairs has been taken for granted and echoed by many historians without reservation. Second, due to Wilson's role in the dismemberment of Hungary during 1918–1919 he has been accused of anti-Hungarian sentiments. Neither of these

³ Arthur Stanley Link, *Wilson, the Diplomatist. A Look at His Major Foreign Policies*. (Baltimore, 1957) is centered around this theme.

⁴ Sigmund Freud and William Christian Bullitt, *Woodrow Wilson, Twenty-eighth President of the United States. A Psychological Study*. (Cambridge, MA, 1966); Alexander L. and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House. A Personality Study*. (New York, 1956); Edwin A. Weinstein, *Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography*. (Princeton, 1981).

⁵ These are mostly studies of the dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire. See for example: Fejtő Ferenc, *Rekviem egy hajdanvolt birodalomért. Ausztria-Magyarország szétrombolása*. (Budapest, 1990); Leo Valiani, *The End of Austria-Hungary*. (London, 1973); Arthur J. May, *The Passing of the Hapsburg Monarchy*. 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1966).

arguments actually holds water and before progressing to the details of Wilson's Hungarian connections these issues need to be clarified.

Wilson's academic writings and his wartime utterances and policies hardly prove his expertise in (Austro-) Hungarian matters. True, in four of his academic writings he addressed the problems of the Monarchy and Hungary but his output is far from convincing. His first such piece was an early essay on Bismarck in which he did not even mention Hungary and dealt with the Habsburg Empire only superficially.⁶ Written in 1889, *The State*, Wilson's next piece discussing the Monarchy, is considered to be one of the highlights of his academic career. It is a lengthy exposition on the theory and practice of the state during human history; and it was within this frame of reference that the would-be President discussed Austria-Hungary and offered an—especially by contemporary American standards—impressive account of the dualist system. That he paid little if any attention to detail was manifested in his rather strange interpretation of the 'rule of the Magyar gentry' in the separate sub-section on Hungary. That notwithstanding, this fifteen-page section in *The State* remains Wilson's longest, best and most quoted piece on (Austria-) Hungary.⁷ In 1908 in *Constitutional Government in the United States* Wilson compared the Magna Carta of England and the Golden Bull of Hungary in a way which makes one feel that he should have left the question alone:

For all she made a similar beginning, Hungary did not obtain constitutional government, and England did. Undoubtedly the chief reason was that the nobles of Hungary contended for the privileges of a class, while the barons of England contended for the privileges of a nation, and that the Englishmen were not seeking to set up any new law or privilege, but to recover and reestablish what they already had and feared they should

⁶ "Prince Bismarck" in: Arthur Stanley Link, et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. 66 vols. (Princeton, 1966—94) 1: 307—14. (Hereafter: *WWPs*).

⁷ Thomas Woodrow Wilson, *The State. Elements of Historical and Practical Politics*. rev. ed. (Boston, 1904): 334—48. (Hereafter: Wilson, *The State*).

lose. Another and hardly less significant reason was that the Englishmen provided machinery for the maintenance of the agreement, and the Magyars did not.⁸

This quote does speak volumes but not of Wilson's expertise in the field but of his unconcealed WASP superiority complex; which would reappear in a strikingly similar public statement during the 1912 election campaign.⁹ The future President's fourth academic reference to Hungary also fails to show him as an expert. In the fifth and final volume of his *A History of the American People* (1902) he revealed his views about Hungarian, Polish and Italian immigrants with a then typical arrogance towards New Immigrants, which earned him a lot of trouble in 1912. According to Wilson, after 1890:

there came multitudes of men of the lowest class from the south of Italy and men of the meaner sort out of Hungary and Poland, men out of the ranks where there was neither skill nor energy nor any initiative of quick intelligence; and they came in numbers which increased from year to year, as if the countries of the south of Europe were disburdening themselves of the more sordid and hapless elements of their population, the men whose standards of life and work were such as American workmen had never dreamed of hitherto.¹⁰

⁸ Thomas Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government in the United States*. (New York, 1908. Reprint: New York, 1961): 6.

⁹ In the opening address of his Connecticut state campaign, on 25 September 1912, Wilson stated: "Why, in that ancient Kingdom of Hungary, for example, contemporary with the great Magna Carta, to which we look back as the source of our constitutional liberties, there was proclaimed upon a notable day the terms of the Great Golden Bull which ran almost in the identical terms of the Magna Carta. But Hungary never could get a foothold for the execution of those principles until she began to send eager multitudes across the ocean to find in America what they had vainly hoped for in Hungary." (*WWPs* 25: 256).

¹⁰ Thomas Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*. 5 vols. (New York, 1902): 5: 212—13.

The evaluation of this statement takes our discussion into the realm of the other misconception regarding Wilson's attitudes towards Hungary: his supposed anti-Hungarianism. This myth has sprung from no less than three different sources. First, from the disillusionment of the then contemporary political elite of Hungary with Wilson's withdrawal of Point Ten of the Fourteen Points. Second, from the Rev. László Harsányi, a New York Reformed Minister, who during his 1920 visit to Hungary began to spread the story that Wilson had actually gotten fed up with the Hungarians during the early 1900s when he served as the notary of New Brunswick and witnessed the rather shocking debates of the representatives of Hungarian-American Reformed Churches. Third, from Wilson's condemnatory statement regarding the Hungarian-Americans, which has been cited earlier. The first of these 'sources' is based upon a misunderstanding of Wilson's East Central European diplomacy or, rather, the Hungarians' unwillingness to accept his decision regarding the cancellation of Point Ten. The second 'source', Harsányi's striking claim, has been refuted by the late Aladár Komjáthy, the host of our workshop, who demonstrated that the New York Minister was interpreting rather freely Wilson's motivations and career.¹¹ Wilson's view of the Hungarian-Americans, commonly known as the 'hunkies', is by far the most interesting element of this puzzle not only because it was used against him in 1912 but also because it sheds more light upon his overall attitudes towards Hungary.

Interestingly, Wilson's dislike of the 'hunkies' or, rather, of the troublesome elements among them, did not go hand in hand with a general dislike of Hungary. To the contrary, through his father he actually picked up the Republican-Protestant image of Hungary, which was cleverly created by Kossuth during his successful 1851—52 visit to the New World. Wilson wrote in *The State*:

¹¹ Komjáthy Aladár, *A kitántorgott egyház*. (Budapest, 1984): 171—72. (Hereafter: Komjáthy, *Kitántorgott*).

Dominant in a larger country than Bohemia, perhaps politically more capable than any Slavonic people, and certainly more enduring and definite in their purposes, the Magyars, though crushed by superior force in the field of battle, have been able to win a specially recognized and highly favored place in the dual monarchy. Although for a long time a land in which the noble was the only citizen, Hungary has been a land of political liberties almost as long as England herself has been.¹²

Wilson's adherence to the romanticized concept of a freedom-loving and chivalrous people was thus based upon a religious twist, which actually worked in favor of Hungary. It is easy to see that by the beginning of the twentieth century Hungary was neither Protestant nor democratic or republican. Everyday contacts in the New World and minor diplomatic crises, such as the arrest of the American Government agent Marcus Braun in Budapest in 1905,¹³ apparently did not impress the American public, which did not bother to review its concept of Hungary the way the British and the French did. This was a token of neither sympathy nor dislike but of an underlying lack of interest in the affairs of Hungary on the part of the Americans. The very same attitude seemed to characterize the writings as well as the political conduct of Woodrow Wilson both as an academic and as Chief Executive of the United States of America. Having thus established the real sources and nature of his attitudes towards Hungary it is now time to offer a brief assessment of Wilson's Hungarian contacts and policies between January 1912 and November 1918.

Wilson's Hungarian-American contacts in 1912 provided an extra dimension for the presidential election campaign in a peculiar way. The

¹² Wilson, *The State*: 335—36.

¹³ A detailed introduction of this episode would extend beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice it to say that Braun was released after President Roosevelt's intervention on his behalf. Marcus Braun, *Immigration Abuses*. (New York, 1906. Reprint: San Francisco, 1972).

American press magnate William R. Hurst decided to back Champ Clark in the Primaries against Wilson and it was the Hurst papers, and not the immigrants, who picked out Wilson's earlier cited rather unfortunate remarks about Italian, Polish and Hungarians newcomers. In the crossfire of the attacks from the Hurst papers and the innumerable requests by immigrants to withdraw his condemnatory remarks,¹⁴ on 22 July 1912 Wilson finally issued the following press statement to the Hungarian-American journalist Géza Kende of the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*:

I believe in the reasonable restriction of immigration but not in any restriction which will exclude from the country honest and industrious peoples who are seeking what America has always offered, an asylum for those who seek a free field. The whole question is a very difficult one but, I think can be solved with justice and generosity. Any one who has the least knowledge of Hungarian history must feel that stock to have proved itself fit for liberty and opportunity.¹⁵

This statement would have settled the issue had Wilson not demonstrated his WASP superiority complex yet again in the September campaign address, which is cited in note 9. Nonetheless, Wilson's eventual victory in the election proved the effectiveness of his campaign manager, Frank McCombs, who later refused to be 'sent to darkest Austria' as ambassador,¹⁶ and the fact that domestic reform (the New Freedom) was the main issue at stake.

Testifying to good political insight and excellent tactical skills, Wilson sought no revenge upon those involved in the campaign against

¹⁴ This aspect of the 1912 election campaign has largely been neglected. For discussion and the relevant documents see: Arthur Stanley Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House*. (Princeton, 1947): 380—90; WWPs 24: 226, 241—43, 269—70, 404—07, 548—49.

¹⁵ See the 23 July 1912 issue of the paper. *The New York Times* also covered the story on the very same day.

¹⁶ WWPs 25: 614, and 27: 127.

him; moreover, he maintained good connections with the few Hungarian-Americans who sided with him during 1912. One such person was the rather mysterious Edmund Gallauner, who was called upon in 1916 to provide similar services in Wilson's campaign for reelection.¹⁷ An even more significant personal connection for Wilson was the New York banker Alexander Konta, arguably the most controversial Hungarian-American figure of the entire war period. Their relationship may hardly be described as friendship; one may say instead that in Konta Wilson had a prominent Hungarian-American whom he could, and willingly did, use if needed. Their post-1912 connections, therefore, deserve special attention.

1916 saw the reestablishment of the Wilson-Konta contacts over the issue of Hungarian-American loyalties to the United States. Due to their involvement in sabotage, which also contributed to the forced withdrawal of the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to Washington, Constantin Theodore Dumba,¹⁸ Hungarian-Americans had to face violent discrimination. Their natural reaction was a public demonstration of their loyalty to their new home country on 30 January 1916; and their resolution was handed over to Wilson by Konta in the White House.¹⁹ Other Hungarian-Americans, however, such as the editors of the all-powerful *Szabadság* of Cleveland, considered this move unnecessary and condemned Konta's action as offering the Hungarian-American vote to the President.²⁰ Thus, at a time when Konta reentered the limelight in the White House his position was undermined in immigrant circles by the attacks in the press.

¹⁷ Library of Congress: Thomas Woodrow Wilson Papers: Series 4: Case Files: no. 5080: Edmund Gallauner. (Hereafter: LC TWWP).

¹⁸ For Dumba's own account see: Constantin Theodore Dumba, *Memoirs of a Diplomat*. (London, 1933).

¹⁹ LC TWWP: Series 4: Case Files: No. 2898: Alexander Konta; WWP 36: 205; Puskás Julianna, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban, 1880—1940*. (Budapest, 1982): 303—15.

²⁰ In the 29 February 1916 issue of the paper.

The other Konta-Wilson encounter, the longest and final one, began in November 1917 and ended sometime during the early summer of 1918. First privately, in November 1917, then publicly as the head of the American-Hungarian Loyalty League, which was established under the auspices of Wilson's own propaganda agency, the Committee on Public Information, Konta accused the Hungarian-American Reformed Churches of spying and sabotaging Americanization. Search warrants were issued and carried out but no definitive evidence was found, which led to Konta's removal from government circles once and for all.²¹ Meanwhile, in order to silence the rather heated debate in Hungarian-American circles, Wilson granted a brief audience to a delegation of Reformed Ministers on 8 July 1918.²² This event, which happened to be Wilson's last direct Hungarian-American contact during the war, may be interpreted in two different ways. It has been argued that this was a clearcut demonstration of the fact that Konta's accusations had been unfounded.²³ An alternative explanation would be that Wilson, although aware of the intentions and activities of the Hungarian-American Reformed Churches, decided to close his eyes and create a domestic consensus to secure support for his foreign policies.

As for such policies, Wilson proved to be a conservative reformer, at least in the Habsburg case. He publicly voiced his dislike of the nature of Habsburg rule in the Monarchy as early as December 1914,²⁴ but refused to join the dismemberment camp until the summer of 1918. In fact, he even refused to meet separatist politicians from the Habsburg Empire until well after the American declaration of war on

²¹ *WWPs* 45: 135—40; Komjáthy, *Kitántorgott*: 141—42.

²² *Szabadság*, 9 July 1918. Edmund (Ödön) Vasváry was among them.

²³ Komjáthy, *Kitántorgott*: 144.

²⁴ In an interview with Henry Bruce Brougham of *The New York Times* Wilson contended: "Austria-Hungary will go to pieces altogether—ought to go to pieces for the welfare of Europe." (*WWPs* 31: 459).

the Dual Monarchy.²⁵ The guiding principle of Wilson's East Central European policy until the summer of 1918 was the removal of Austria-Hungary from the war preferably by a separate peace. Only when it became clear that this policy would not work did Wilson decide to go for the more radical option: dismemberment.²⁶ Yet, even after casting his vote for the independence of the Czechs and the South Slavs, the American President sought to establish some sort of regional integration in the Danubian Basin; and this remained the chief concern for his task force for peace preparations, the Inquiry. Interestingly, Wilson refused to consider the alternative to full dismemberment, the removal of Austria-Hungary from the war through the separation of Hungary from Austria.

Actually, the stage for such a move was set by Tisza's mid-1917 removal and his widely cited assessment of the situation: 'this is nothing short of revolution'.²⁷ Meanwhile in December 1917, Fiorello LaGuardia, the future Mayor of New York City then serving in the US Signal Corps in Italy, proposed direct undercover action in support of Károlyi, which Wilson rejected on moral grounds.²⁸ Wilson's categorical refusal, however, was not the outcome of careful consideration: with the reports of the State Department and of Military and Naval Intelligence casting no light upon the situation in Hungary,²⁹

²⁵ It is common knowledge that Masaryk was the first such politician whom Wilson saw, in mid-June, 1918.

²⁶ Wilson's wartime utterances as well as the memoirs of Robert Lansing, his second Secretary of State all testify to that. See also: Frank P. Chambers, *The War Behind the War, 1914—1918. A History of the Political and Civilian Fronts*. (London, 1939); Victor S. Mamatey, *The United States and East-Central Europe, 1914—1918. A Study in Wilsonian Diplomacy and Propaganda*. (Princeton, 1957).

²⁷ Apparently first cited in the 16 June 1917 issue of *The New Republic*.

²⁸ National Archives, Washington, D.C.: Record Group 59: Decimal Files of the Department of State: M 708: reel 3: Thomas Nelson Page to Lansing, 29 December 1917; Wilson to Lansing, 1 January 1918.

²⁹ This statement is based upon an extensive reading of the relevant State Department and Intelligence files in the National Archives.

Wilson could not have realized that such a move would have been doomed to failure. Simply, he was reluctant to take such a drastic step as early as the turn of 1917—18. On top of that, Wilson developed serious reservations about Károlyi, who had toured the United States in the company of ‘socialists’ (Kunfi, etc.) in 1914.³⁰ While Károlyi enjoyed a surprisingly strong support in the American press Wilson continued to disregard him during 1917 considering the Hungarian aristocrat to be politically weightless. Károlyi was also unacceptable for personal reasons; namely because he was reportedly in regular contact with the Hungarian feminist Rosika Bedy-Schwimmer, who due to an act of indiscretion back in September 1914, was considered *persona non grata* in the Wilson White House.³¹

On the strength of the above considerations one may say that Wilson did not develop a coherent Hungarian policy during the World War, nor was he by any means hostile towards the lesser half of the lesser Central Power. Wilson represented the then typical American romanticizing attitude towards Hungary, which he abandoned for personal reasons (Károlyi, Bedy-Schwimmer) and due to unforeseen changes in global high politics during the early summer of 1918. His sympathy for Kossuth’s Protestant-Republican Hungary of some 70 years before was gradually replaced by a new set of preferences, especially Czech orientation, which later guided his conduct in East Central European affairs at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

³⁰ Gróf Károlyi Mihály, *Hit, illúziók nélkül*. (Budapest, 1977): 62—63. Konta tried in vain to fix an interview for Károlyi with Wilson through McCombs: WWPs 29: 404, 407.

³¹ Barbara S. Kraft, *The Peace Ship. Henry Ford’s Pacifist Adventure in the First World War*. (New York and London, 1978): 10—11. Later in 1918 Károlyi appointed Bedy-Schwimmer to Berne and the Americans forced her withdrawal; see: Peter Pastor, The Diplomatic Fiasco of the Modern World’s First Woman Ambassador, Rosa Bedy-Schwimmer. in: *East European Quarterly*, vol. 8 no. 3 (1975): 273—82.

M. THOMAS INGE

SAM WATKINS AND THE FICTIONALITY OF FACT

The name Samuel Rush Watkins is not one you will find entered in the major encyclopedias of the South or the Civil War, nor will you find it indexed in most of the extensive historical chronicles of that event in American history. He was a bit forgetful when it came to names and dates in his one published book, which historian Bell Irvin Wiley said had

a number of limitations and deficiencies. The fact of his working solely from memory caused him to make some errors of detail ... His prejudices sometimes led to distortions ... Watkins sometimes reports as direct quotations long excerpts from prayers and speeches which he admittedly did not write down at the time and he could not have remembered after twenty years. Some of the instances which he relates have the flavor of tall tales....¹

Also Roy P. Basler has taken note of Watkins's "minor inaccuracies in the recording of names and recollections of precise dates..."² Yet when

¹ Bell Irvin Wiley, "Introduction," "Co. Aytch." *Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment; or, A Side Show of the Big Show* (Jackson, Tenn.: McCowat—Mercer Press, 1952) 11—23 (quotations on pp. 17, 19).

² Roy P. Basler, "Introduction," "Co. Aytch": *A Side Show of the Big Show* (New York: Collier, 1962) 5—9 (quotation on p. 9).

writers want local color and memorable first-hand comments by a literate witness, they turn to Watkins. Every segment of the recent PBS television series by Ken Burns, *The Civil War* (1990), included quotations from Watkins's comments and observations (the published text by Geoffrey C. Ward includes over twenty), and the multi-volume Time-Life series, *The Civil War*, quoted from him over a dozen times.³

It is, indeed, not the history but the quotability and engaging personality of Sam Watkins that has kept his book in print since it first appeared down to today under the title of "*Co. Aytch*," *Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment; or, A Side Show of the Big Show*. First published serially in his hometown newspaper, the *Columbia Herald*, beginning May 13, 1881, and continuing through 1882, the columns were promptly collected and issued by the Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House of Nashville in an edition of 2,000 in both hardcover and paper covers. The reputation of the book was so strong after the first edition was exhausted that in 1900 another edition of 2,000 copies was issued by the *Chattanooga Times* newspaper with a few minor changes. The demand for copies of "*Co. Aytch*" among collectors during the next half decade led to the publication of a facsimile reprint of the 1900 edition by the McCowatt-Mercer Press of Jackson, Tennessee, in 1952 with an introduction by Bell Irvin Wiley, an index, and illustrations drawn from photographic archives. A popular paperback edition appeared in 1962 in the Collier Books Civil War Classics series with an introduction by Roy P. Basler, and in 1982 a facsimile reprint of the first edition was issued by the Press of Morningside Bookshop in Dayton, Ohio, with an introduction by Lee A. Wallace, Jr., an index, and further contemporary photographs.⁴

³ See Geoffrey C. Ward, *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* (New York: Knopf, 1990), and *The Civil War*, 28 vols. (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1987).

⁴ "*Co. Aytch*," *Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment; or, A Side Show of the Big Show*, with an introduction by Lee A. Wallace, Jr. (Dayton, Ohio: Press of Morningside Bookshop, 1982).

Sam Watkins's "*Co. Aytch*" is a personal memoir of his experiences in the Civil War which has been acclaimed by his admirers as a lively and witty commentary on the war and its significance from the unusual point of view of an ordinary southern foot soldier. Watkins had a way with words, and he invested his memoirs with a high degree of literary artistry and narrative skill. His uses of irony, humor, metaphor, imagery, fable, and description compare favorably with such authors as Stephen Crane, Ambrose Bierce, and others who created works of fiction about the Civil War. An examination of the literary qualities of "*Co. Aytch*" raises issues about the fictionality of fact and the factuality of fiction. Can one write a primary historical document that has the characteristics of fiction, and what does that tell us about the nature of literary art and its relation to reality?

The details of the life and career of Sam Watkins suggest little about his acquaintance with literature or the sources of his inspiration as a writer. He was born June 26, 1839, near Columbia, Tennessee, on a farm owned by his father, who came originally from North Carolina. Aside from working his father's land, we only know that in his youth he clerked at the general store owned by S. F. and J. M. Mayes in Columbia,⁵ suggesting some rudimentary instruction in mathematics, but we know nothing definite of his early education. He did attend, however, Jackson College in Columbia, which burned in 1862 and did not reopen after the war. No doubt here he studied the classics, theology, rhetoric, and the standard fare at such schools for young men of the time (a quotation from Vergil's *Aeneid*, 2.5—6. appears on the title page of "*Co. Aytch*" which suggests some acquaintance with classical literature and translated means: "which most wretched things I myself saw and was a great part of them").

At the age of twenty-one, in the spring of 1861, when it appeared that Tennessee was about to secede and war was certain, Sam Watkins

⁵ See Sam R. Watkins, "*Co. Aytch*," *Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment; or, a Side Show of the Big Show*, hereafter abbreviated as W (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House, 1882) 146. All quotations in the text are from this edition.

joined his neighborhood friends and enlisted first in the Bigby Grays on April 26 and later the Maury Grays on May 15, then being organized as Company H of the First Regiment Tennessee Volunteers. When word came that Virginia had been invaded, the First Tennessee voted to join their forces. Thus Sam first saw action in September with the Army of Northwestern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee, whom he would describe as a kind, courtly, and charismatic man: "I fell in love with the old gentleman," said Watkins, after speaking with him, "and felt like going home with him" (W, 18—19).

As we witness by the narrative of "*Co. Aytch*," Watkins would fight through some of the most difficult battles of the Civil War. Service at Shiloh was followed by the Corinth, Perryville, Murfreesboro, Shelbyville, Chattanooga, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, the Hundred Days Battles, Atlanta, Jonesboro, Franklin, and Nashville campaigns. He was wounded three times at Murfreesboro, Atlanta, and Nashville but always recovered to reenter the fray. Out of the original 1,250 men who formed the Army of Tennessee, and the 1,950 recruits and conscripts who joined them, only 65 officers and men remained when the war was concluded in 1865. Out of the 120 men who enlisted with Watkins in Company H in 1861, he was one of only seven survivors.

It was during the lull following the bloody battle at Murfreesboro that young Watkins took French leave for three days to visit his fiancée, Virginia Jane Mayes, in Columbia. He escaped court-martial with only a forfeiture of four months pay. He returned to marry her on September 5, 1865, and settled down to married life, a succession of eight children, and divided his time between farming and running a general store. In April of 1881, he began to devote his evenings and early mornings to writing, and before his death on July 20, 1901, at the age of 62, Watkins had written or published in addition to "*Co. Aytch*" a quantity of articles for magazines and newspapers about his Civil War experiences. He seemed possessed by a keen desire to tell about the war from the ground up, as it appeared to a man who lived, fought, and survived one of the worst conflicts in human history.

The entire book is given a literary framework from the start. Watkins begins the narrative with what amounts to a fable about the war which posits both the absurdity of it and his own balanced view of the outcome. He tells of a time when one William L. Yancy began to promote the “strange and peculiar notion that the sun rose in the east and set in the west, and that the compass pointed north and south.” Many people who believed that “the United States of America had no north, no south, no east, no west” argued against this notion, including the Puritans, “Horrors” Greely, and Charles Sumner, and soon all the people were “fighting and gouging” over the argument. The two sides elected Jeff Davis and Abe Lincoln captains and fell to fighting. “Abe’s side got the best of the argument,” and now “the sun rises over the hills and sets over the mountains, the compass just points up and down, and we can laugh now at the absurd notion of there being a north and a south.” Instead, now “we are one and undivided” (W, 8—10). The irony of the conclusion is clear—Watkins believes that it will take more than a war to eradicate regionalism in the United States —, but by reducing the conflict to a neighborhood scrap, he also undercuts any justification for the thousands of lives lost in the struggle. He appears to side too with those who argued that the war was basically a conflict between two economic systems, one agricultural and the other industrial, over the fate of the nation. That he was fighting to preserve slavery never seems to have crossed his mind.

The second framing device is to envision the war as a circus. The title page calls his account “A Side Show to the Big Show,” an image that is returned to in the conclusion: “The curtain is rung down, the foot-lights are put out, the audience has all left and gone home, the seats are vacant, and the cold walls are silent” (W, 233). Thus the pomp and circumstance of battle, the posturings and assertions of patriotism amount to no more than the antics of the clown and the tumblings of the acrobat in a stage show at the circus. Both the opening fable and this sustained metaphor work effectively to establish an attitude and point of view for both the narrator and the reader.

At the time Watkins was writing in 1881, American literature was moving largely under the influence of realism. While such writers as William Dean Howells and Henry James felt the writer should devote himself to describing the tasteful and the beautiful in the world of daily life, others such as Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland, Kate Chopin, and Frank Norris moved the focus directly on the tragic aspects of life and painted a sometimes horrifying view of man fighting a hostile, mechanical world of injustice and sudden death. In attempting to describe his experiences in what he called an “unholy and uncalled for war” (W, 94), Watkins instinctively adopted the methods of realism and spared the reader nothing in describing the horror and brutality of the battlefield.

It is interesting to compare the way Bierce and Watkins describe one of the same engagements at which both were witnesses, the bloody battle of Chickamauga. Bierce’s story “Chickamauga,” written around 1889, over 25 years after the event, adopts the strategy of limiting the point of view to that of a six-year-old deaf and mute child who has wandered onto the battlefield by mistake, before moving to a larger adult perspective to render ironic judgement on the carnage. The child mistakes wounded soldiers dragging themselves to a creek for water as bear-like but gentle creatures with which he can play:

He now approached one of these crawling figures from behind and with an agile movement mounted it astride. The man sank upon his breast, recovered, flung the small boy fiercely to the ground as an unbroken colt might have done, then turned upon him a face that lacked a lower jaw—from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone.⁶

In his chapter on Chickamauga, Watkins includes a strikingly similar image in describing the aftermath of battle as he walks across the field of slaughter:

⁶ *The Collected Writings of Ambrose Bierce* (New York: Citadel Press, 1946) 21.

Men were laying where they fell, shot in every conceivable part of the body. Some with their entrails torn out and still hanging to them and piled upon the ground beside them, and they still alive. Some with their underjaw torn off, and hanging by a fragment of skin to their cheeks, with their tongues lolling from their mouths, and they trying to talk (W, 97).

The difference here, of course, is that Bierce has couched his scene of horror within the comfortable context of a piece of fiction, even though the rude juxtaposition of a young child witnessing this offers its own unsettling contrast. Watkins gives us his view exactly as he witnessed it, and we are both repelled and attracted by the sight as we are by a photograph of a mutilation from which we are unable to divert our eyes. Bierce, of course, witnessed Chickamauga from the position of a topographical officer on the sidelines, while Watkins was there on the field participating in the bloodshed. For those who know this, it lends an element of authenticity to Watkins, but in any case, his passage is at least equally compelling and powerful. It could be argued too that Bierce's use of a child is rather contrived and appeals too strongly to the sentimental side of the reader, while Watkins resorts to no easy emotion other than unadulterated horror.

The great American fictional classic of the Civil War is, of course, *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, written in 1893 and published in 1895 and based only on extensive reading in books about the war. There are so many parallels between "*Co. Aytch*" and *The Red Badge* that I suspect Watkins's book must have been among those read by the young author born six years after the war was over. I will suggest only a few.

Like the fictional Henry Fleming in Crane's novel, Sam Watkins as yet uninitiated in battle also feels envy for those who have encountered "war, the blood swollen god"⁷ and wear their wounds proudly:

⁷ Stephen Crane, *The Red Budge of Couruge*, hereafter abbreviated as *RB*, Crane, *Prose and Poetry* (New York: Library of America, 1984) 103.

Ah, how we envied those that were wounded. We thought at that time that we would have given a thousand dollars to have been in the battle, and to have had our arm shot off, so we could have returned home with an empty sleeve (W, 16).

Crane offers the same idea more succinctly:

At times he regarded the wounded soldiers in an envious way. He conceived persons with torn bodies to be peculiarly happy. He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage (RB, 133).

Except for the final felicitous image that gave the book its title, Watkins's style is as simple and as direct as that of Crane.

One of the most famous and often-explicated images in Crane's novel is the final line of chapter nine: "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" (RB, 137). Watkins also had his own red sun as a silent witness to the ravages of man: "The sun was poised above us, a great red ball, sinking slowly in the west, yet the scene of battle and carnage continued" (W, 54).

The most frequently discussed figure in *The Red Badge* is the tall soldier, Jim Concklin, who lurches through chapter nine in a coma-like state, incoherently conversing with Henry, finally to collapse into a death tremor. Henry reports, "As the flap of the blue jacket fell away from the body, he could see that the side looked as if it had been chewed by wolves" (RB, 137). Watkins has a very similar experience with an equally spectral figure at Murfreesboro:

As I went back to the field hospital, I overtook another man walking along. I do not know to what regiment he belonged, but I remember of first noticing that his left arm was entirely gone. His face was as white as a sheet. The breast and sleeve of his coat had been torn away, and I could see the frazzled end of his shirt sleeve, which appeared to be sucked into the wound. I looked at it pretty close, and I said "Great God!" for I could see his heart throb, and the respiration of his lungs. I was filled with wonder and horror at the sight. He was walking

along, when all at once he dropped down and died without a struggle or a groan (W, 68—69).

Finally, Watkins frequently reflects on the tranquillity of nature which serves as a reminder of continuity in the scheme of things and the futile efforts of man to wreak havoc on the world, as in his final paragraph:

The tale is told. The world moves on, the sun shines as brightly as before, the flowers bloom as beautifully, the birds sing their carols as sweetly, the trees nod and bow their leafy tops as if slumbering in the breeze, ... and the scene melts and gradually disappears forever (W, 336).

Crane is a bit more explicit:

As he gazed around him the youth felt a flash of astonishment at the blue, pure sky and the sun gleamings on the trees and the fields. It was surprising that Nature had gone tranquilly on with her golden process in the midst of so much devilment (RB, 116).

And like Watkins, Crane's final line rests with nature: "Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds" (RB, 212).

These and additional parallels do suggest that "*Co. Aytch*" may have served as a source or is at least an analogue for Crane's novel, but I do not mean to suggest that Watkins is Crane's equal as a writer. Crane's wonderfully concise, poetically vivid, and psychologically accurate prose is one of the treasures of American literature. It is interesting to note that in these examples, as in others, both resorted to similar images and ideas, and Watkins has his own power deriving from an ability to describe his actual experiences without the adornment and romantic distancing characteristic of most commentators on the Civil War. Both give us an unadorned realism in prose, but one writes history and the other fiction.

Watkins also provides us with scenes and events which, as far as I know, have no parallels in the fiction of his time. For example, there is

the macabre story of the Rebel deserter and turncoat named Rowland who arrived at his place of execution to find his grave full of water and asked for a drink from it because “he had heard that water was very scarce in hell, and it would be the last he would ever drink” (W, 42). A more touching execution, and several are described in detail, is that of two Yankee spies who turn out to be young boys of sixteen and fourteen. When the younger begins to cry and plead for his life, “the older one kicked him and told him to stand up and show the Rebels how a Union man could die for his country.” As they dangled from the ropes, Watkins noted, “I turned off sick at heart” (W, 83). Such stories could easily fit a fictional context, except Watkins tells us they actually happened.

Perhaps the most engaging element in Watkins’s book is his sense of humor and irony which becomes evident whether he is talking about a louse race among the gambling soldiers, eating rats in hungry desperation, jeering a deserting officer, or ridiculing a chaplain who exhorts the men to die and “sup to-night in Paradise” but runs when the bombs begin to fall as the soldiers shout, “The parson isn’t hungry, and never eats supper” (W, 91). He could also capture with a gentle sense of comic self-deprecation one of his own social *faux pas* at the dinner table of a Chattanooga family with two handsome daughters in attendance. The food is abundant and good, but then the mother tells a daughter to pass the butter to Watkins, which he refuses because his plate is full:

Now, there is nothing that will offend a lady so quick as to refuse to take butter when handed to you. ... If you don’t eat butter, it is an insult; if you eat too much, she will make your ears burn after you have left. It is a regulator of society; it is a civilizer; it is a luxury and a delicacy that must be touched and handled with care and courtesy on all occasions. Should you desire to get on the good side of a lady, just give a broad, sweeping, slathering compliment to her butter. It beats kissing the dirty-faced baby; it beats anything. Too much praise cannot be bestowed upon the butter, be it good, bad, or

indifferent to your notions of things, but to her, her butter is always good, superior, excellent. I did not know this characteristic of the human female at the time, or I would have taken a delicate slice of butter.

Here is a sample of the colloquy that followed: "Mister, have some butter?" "Not any at present, thank you, madam." "Well, I insist upon it; our butter is nice." "O, I know it's nice, but my plate is full, thank you." "Well, take some anyhow." One of the girls spoke up and said: "Mother, the gentleman don't wish butter." "Well, I want him to know that our butter is clean, anyhow." "Well, madam, if you insist upon it, there is nothing that I love so well as warm biscuit and butter. I'll thank you for the butter." I dive in. I go in a little too heavy. The old lady hints in a delicate way that they sold butter. I dive in heavier. That cake of butter was melting like snow in a red hot furnace. The old lady says, "We sell butter to the soldiers at a mighty good price." I dive in afresh. She says, "I get a dollar a pound for that butter," and I remark with a good deal of nonchalance, "Well, madam, it is worth it," and I dive in again. I did not marry one of the girls (W, 87—88).

Such a passage is an excellent example of how effectively Watkins handles dialogue, characterization, and humor to dramatic effect.

Watkins repeats over and over again in the course of his book, "Please remember, patient reader, that I write entirely from memory. I have no data or diary or anything to go by, and memory is a peculiar faculty" (W, 50). Readers who want descriptions of the battles from the larger perspective of leaders and officers should look elsewhere: "I know nothing of history. See the histories for grand movements and military maneuvers. I can only tell what I saw and how I felt" (W, 201), and he adds, "I only write of the under *strata* of history; in other words, the *privates'* history—as I saw things then, and remember them now" (W, 229). But as Roy P. Basler has observed, whatever his failures to remember names and dates, "his historical perspective was sounder

than that of many more important but far less intelligent men who occupied posts of high responsibility in the years 1861—1865.”⁸ As for the events themselves, Watkins affirmed, “every word of this is true... everything in this book” (W, 156).

The British historian Herbert Butterfield suggested in his essay on the “historical novel” that “history cannot come so near to human hearts and human passions as a good novel can; its very fidelity to facts makes it not perhaps less true to life, but farther away from the heart of things.”⁹ Watkins’s piece of personal history then moves towards fiction in its reflections on “human hearts and human passions” in conflict and takes us to the heart of the absurd experience of war. Effective fiction, however, according to Butterfield, also possesses a historical sensibility:

It is when the reader can feel that the things that are being related actually took place, and that the man about whom the stories are being told really lived although the stories about him may not all be true; it is when the thread of incident in the novel, as well as what might be called the texture of the book, can in some way be called “historical,” that the work is most effective in its grip on actuality.¹⁰

“*Co. Aytch*” clearly has, then, the narrative power of fiction about which Butterfield speaks, and we come to know and believe in Sam Watkins as a real person, not because he was, but because of the dramatic appeal of his literary ability as a writer.

In answer to the question, “Why do we read fiction?” Robert Penn Warren once wrote:

The answer is simple. We read it because we like it. And we like it because fiction, as an image of life, stimulates and

⁸ Basler, “Introduction,” 9.

⁹ Herbert Butterfield, *The Historical Novel: An Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924) 18.

¹⁰ Butterfield, *The Historical Novel*, 52.

gratifies our interest in life. But whatever interest may be appealed to by fiction, the special and immediate interest that takes us to fiction is always our interest in a story. A story is not merely an image of life, but life in motion—specifically, the presentation of individual characters moving through their particular experiences to some end that we may accept as meaningful. And the experience that is characteristically presented in a story is that of facing a problem, a conflict. To put it bluntly: no conflict, no story.¹¹

Viewed from this perspective, “*Co. Aytch*” has all the appeal of fiction. Sam Watkins is a character moving through a meaningful action within the greatest possible conflict in American history—one that spelled the fate of the nation.

A work like “*Co. Aytch*” compels us to reconsider the artificial boundaries between history and fiction. This is a work that hews to the truth of an individual experience as humanly as possible and provides a realistic portrayal of human nature at its most noble and despicable. It is a primary historical document of the first order: balanced, objective, and truthful. Because of his skills as a writer—a realist, a humorist, and a stylist of unusual ability—Sam Watkins’s book has the appeal of fiction and engages our interest as effectively and fully as does any well-crafted story or novel. His book deserves to be read alongside other fictional accounts of the Civil War because of the authenticity of the experience it portrays and the talent it reflects. In this case the fictionality of fact matches the factuality of fiction.

¹¹ Roben Penn Warren, “Why Do We Read Fiction?” Warren, *New and Selected Essays* (New York: Random, 1989) 55—66 (quotation on p. 55).

ANDRÁS TARNÓC

ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN CHICANO LITERATURE:
THE VOICE OF "LA RAZA"

I

Although Chicano literature originates from the 16th century, as Marcos Farfán's now lost 1598 play established the literary tradition in New Mexico (Paredes 34), it had been assigned to one of the "forgotten chapters of American literature" ((Magyar... 751). This tragic historical and cultural oversight was due to a widespread belief dating the origin of American literature from the settlement of Jamestown in 1607, a lack of appreciation for oral culture: a touchstone of Mexican-American literary activity, and a wholesale dismissal of literary modes not invented in Europe (Leal and Barrón 12).

The formation of the Chicano social and cultural context dates back to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which put an end to the disastrous Mexican-American War and substantially increased the size of the United States with the addition of the Texas Territory transferring approximately 80,000 Mexican citizens under American jurisdiction (Elliott 800).

Chicano literature and Chicano consciousness are artistic and ideological manifestations of Hispanic America's ethnic, political, and cultural regeneration in the late 1960's. "El Movimiento," a Hispanic offspring of the Civil Rights Movement, laid the foundations of the

Chicano Renaissance, a decade of flourishing literary activity by U.S. citizens of Mexican descent or Americans of Mexican origin whose description of their specific experiences is driven by a sense of ethnicity (Paredes 74).

II

The Mexican-American Past

Mexican-American history can be divided into five distinct periods offering a foundation for respective stages of literary development. Spanish colonial presence in the territory between Southeast Texas and California began in the middle of the 16th century and lasted until 1809. Following the failure of Panfilo de Narvaez's expedition to reach the Rio Grande, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca led a few survivors across the American Southwest before reaching Mexico and arousing the interest of the Viceroy of New Spain in the potential wealth of the area. During this period the two cornerstones of Spanish colonial administration, the authority of the church and state were established. The continuous struggle between the two entities undermined colonial rule and led to the Pueblo Rebellion of New Mexico in 1680. In 1730 responding to an impending threat of French expansion, Spanish rule was established in the Texas Territory, and following France's defeat in the French and Indian War, Spain reassumed control of the Louisiana Territory. To thwart Russian advances in the Pacific Coast region Spain expanded into California in 1769.

In 1810 Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costillo sounded the call of revolt against Spanish rule leading to the collapse of New Spain in 1821. The so-called Mexican era saw a conflict with the United States as Americans driven by the idea of Manifest Destiny crossed the Mississippi and ensuing cultural, political, and ethnic differences resulted in the Mexican-American War of 1846—48.

Despite guarantees of protection for Mexican political and economic rights, cultural dislocation and political oppression characterized the period of "Anglo-American Conquest" lasting from 1849 till 1910 (Moquin 251). In a clash of opposing systems of property rights and law codes, the Anglo-Americans became victorious as Spanish land titles could not stand the test of the dominant legal system. In his account of the activity of the Land Commission, established by Congress in 1851, John S. Hittel of Hutchings' California Magazine argued that the defeat of Mexican land titles not only eliminated Mexican-American estates but laid the foundations for an economic, cultural, and demographic crisis as well (Moquin 263—71).

Responding to the desperate plight of Mexicans, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina rebelled against American rule in Texas and achieved a mythical status after several clashes with the Texas Rangers. His "Proclamation to the Mexican-Americans of South Texas" anticipated the ethnic pride movements of the 1960's, describing his race as a group of proud, gentle people filled with "inward sweetness and adorned with the most lovely disposition towards all that is good and useful in the line of progress" (Moquin 274—75). Cortina's reference to Mexicans "lifting their grand edifice among the ruins of the past" anticipates the Chicano Movement's later invocation of the myth of Aztlán.

The fourth period of Mexican-American history started in 1910 with the Mexican revolution and is personified by the image of the immigrant. Although northward immigration from Mexico started in the 1840's, Porfirio Diaz's corrupt and brutal regime functioned as the main push factor from 1910. Mexican immigrants comprised a large sector of the labor force of the Southwest working in three main areas, agriculture, mining and railroad construction. Whereas Mexican immigration is mostly associated with field workers escaping peonage, the establishment of the League of United Latin American Citizens in 1929 reflects such middle-class goals as the "acquisition of the English language" and the development of the "best, purest and most perfect type of a true and loyal citizen of the United States of America." At the

same time the desire for ethnic pride is also present in a declaration of “sincere and respectful” reverence for the signers’ racial origins (Moquin 364—65).

The last period reflects the growth of self-awareness taking place between 1940 and 1970. The foundations of the Brown Power Movement were laid by increased immigration following the economics-motivated forced repatriations during the Depression and a political identification with the Third World, mostly Central and Latin America (Moquin 390—91).

One of the predecessors of the Chicano Movement is the *pachuco* phenomenon of the 1940’s. Responding to political, cultural, and economic segregation, young Mexican-Americans formed gangs and adopted a specific apparel viewing themselves as contemporary legatees of the Aztec heritage. This primarily youth-driven movement culminated in the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 during which Anglo soldiers on leave clashed with Mexican-American youths in the East Los Angeles area.

In 1951—1965 the *bracero* program, a government sponsored seasonal agricultural laborer importation scheme, was in effect. The Chicano Movement was given a final impetus in September 1965, when heretofore disunionized Mexican-American grape pickers in Delano, California went on strike under the leadership of César Chávez. Although the strike aimed to achieve better pay and more humane working conditions, giving rise to a new ethnic consciousness it went beyond economics.

The term “Chicano” supposedly originated from Northern Mexico where the citizens of Chihuahua added the first syllable of the name of their hometown to the designation “Mexicano.” Although the name has been widely used since the 1930’s by Mexicans referring to someone caught between the Anglo and the indigenous world, and was heard during the Zoot Suit Riots as well, it only gained political currency after the Delano grape strike (Moquin 499—500).

The Chicano Aesthetic, like its Black counterpart, is a reaction to the historical exclusion of Mexican-Americans from the United States’

public discourse. The “black legend,” an Anglo-Saxon generated image symbolizing the cruelty of conquistadors toward Native Americans in the 16th century, resulted in the wholesale condemnation of the Spanish legacy:

Spain has been tried and convicted in the forum of history. Her religion has been bigotry ... her statesmanship has been infamy: her diplomacy, hypocrisy: her wars have been massacres: her supremacy has been a blight and a curse, condemning continents to sterility, and their inhabitants to death. (Hunt 58)

The “black legend” not only projected a negative attitude to a nation, but also led to stereotypical descriptions of Hispanic/Latino males culminating in the infamous “greaser” image. Jeremiah Clemens’ *Texas Romances* emphasize the greasy appearance of the American Southwest: “The people look greasy, their houses are greasy—everywhere grease and filth hold divided dominion” (Rocard 11). Willa Cather’s “The Dance at Chevalier’s” points to the greasiness of a Mexican’s hand and O.Henry accused the Mexican as the “greaser of the nation” (Rocard 11). Charles Fletcher Lummis described New Mexico as the “anomaly of the Republic, a land of poco tiempo,” (Moquin 316) employing such soon to be time-worn images as self-sacrificing hospitality, and romantic savagery: “Last of all, the Mexicans; in-bred and isolation-shrunken descendants of the Castilian world-finders; living almost as much against the house as in it; ignorant as slaves, and more courteous than kings; poor as Lazarus and more hospitable than Croesus” (Moquin 318).

The Development of Chicano Literature

Leal and Barrón’s pre-Chicano literature period comprises both of Moquin’s “Hispano-Indian synthesis” (1) and the literary activity of the “Mexican Southwest” (161). This period is dominated by historical descriptions of the Southwest, including Gaspar Perez de Villagra’s

Historia de la Nueva Mexico and the accounts of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca concerning his own exploits. The authors were mostly Spanish explorers but as Philip D. Ortego argued these works deal with distinctly American topics following a “unique metamorphosis, integrating alien elements which were to herald a distinct kind of New World literature” (Leal and Barrón 16).

The most frequent forms of literary expression were fast-paced narrative ballads or poems set to music, called corridos, religious plays and folktales (Leal and Barrón 16). Paredes asserts that the corrido was the principal literary genre for Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. The term originally means ‘to run’ in Spanish and the ballads have Spanish colonial roots. The corrido is the product of the Anglo-Mexican cultural conflict viewing the events of the Southwest from a distinctly Mexican-American vantage point (Lauter 828).

One of the oldest corridos, “Kiansis,” describes a cattle drive from Texas to Kansas serving as a background to a rivalry between Anglo and Mexican cattlemen during which the latter proudly hold their own in a crisis. The ballad displays a clash of myths and in the end the vaquero defeats the cowboy. The poem promotes a human ideal who not only protects the herd but upholds the integrity of the Mexican-American cultural heritage. “Kiansis” actually reclaims the cowboy myth, one of the most cherished legends of Anglo culture, and proves J. Frank Dobie right, who asserted that the Anglo ranching industry was the straight descendant of Mexican cattle herding and raising practices with the vaquero functioning as the teacher of the cowboy (Moquin 377).

“Gregorio Cortez” tells of the protagonist’s clash with the “rinches,” or the Texas Rangers. Cortez, a Mexican-American rancher defending his brother, gets in conflict with the law after he shoots a sheriff and makes his way toward the Mexican border. In the poem the relatively peaceful rivalry between vaqueros and cowboys gives way to a deadly gunfight as Cortez, a lone Mexican, symbolizes ethnic pride and defiance of Anglo authority. Cortez is the opposite of the stereotypical docile Mexican as his very name and weapon instills fear

in the heart of Anglos and his individuality is reminiscent of the Western hero.

"Jacinto Trevino" continues to upset the traditional value structure of the Southwest as the protagonist remains the last person to defy the Texas Rangers, eluding their deadly grasp. "The Disobedient Son," commemorating a young man's death warranted by his overpowering male ego probes another side of the Mexican-American ideal: the respect of one's family and the notion of *compadrazgo*, the idea that the psychological proximity of a family should be projected onto the social sphere. As the son must pay with his life for threatening to kill his father, who is intervening to stop an impending duel, the sanctity of the family is upheld.

It is noteworthy that despite being predominantly a 19th-century mode of literary expression, the corrido survived to perpetuate more recent heroes of the Mexican-American community. "Remembering the President," mourning the death of John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic Chief Executive of the nation, not only reflects religious affinity but praises Kennedy for maintaining an emotional bond with the Latin American community. "The Ballad of César Chávez" celebrates the leader of the Delano grape strike, who continued the proud defiance of Cortez and Trevino with the power of non-violence, and his stand and personal conviction not only led to the success of the labor dispute contributing to the growth of *la Raza*, or the Mexican-American people, but as Robert F. Kennedy's participation at a Delano mass invoking the Virgin of Guadalupe indicated, mainstream American acceptance of Chicano culture and society as well.

The corrido as a product of Anglo-American cultural conflict concentrates on the Mexican-American hero. The paradigms can take the form of the vaquero engaged in an economic and cultural rivalry with the American cowboy, the rancher turned desperado achieving a moral victory over Anglo vigilantes, the politician whose decision-making process is motivated by an awareness of the needs of the greater community, and the labor organizer whose personal sacrifice and religious conviction earn a lasting victory for Hispanic Americans.

The vaquero holding his own during a cattle drive incident demonstrates that Mexican-American culture is equal to Anglo civilization, and the very foundation of the latter's most cherished myth is of Hispanic origin. Gregorio Cortez and Jacinto Trevino first appear to be reversals of the American frontier hero, but both sacrifice themselves for the notion of *compadrazgo*. "The Disobedient Son" demonstrates the superiority of the community and family over individual pride. Both JFK and César Chávez had to confront their immediate surroundings: geopolitics and labor relations respectively, to promote the cause of the Mexican and greater Latin American community. In all cases the protagonist's victory is the community's triumph as well, presenting an opposing paradigm to Anglo-American individualism.

One of the defining images of Chicano poetry is the notion of liminality, or the sense of being suspended, or caught between two cultures. Whereas the corrido born from the vortex of Anglo-Mexican cultural conflict anticipates this trope, it does not yet suffer from Padilla's "orphan complex:" a notion of alienation from the U.S. and a lack of spiritual link to Mexico (Pérez—Torres 65). The spiritual connection is present in the protagonists' sacrifices for the community and as Tomas Rivera asserts "the corrido ... is the primary vehicle through which a more spiritual totality is explained" (Leal and Barrón 17).

Whereas the corrido places Mexican-American culture in a dualist framework, it fails to form a bridge between Chicano and Anglo cultures. In the merger of the aesthetic and the socio-cultural an "antidote to the disease of cultural and spiritual conquest" is provided (Pérez—Torres 47). The corrido also functions as the forerunner of multiculturalism and postmodernism. Pérez—Torres distinguishes two types of multiculturalism: the neotraditional view is a backlash against modernism, and the resistant school emphasizes inequality concentrating upon how different cultures function (15). The corrido's protagonists continuously face the unequal social and economic

conditions of the Southwest and operate in the buffer zone between Anglo and Mexican culture.

These ballads with a staunch anti-Anglo message reveal a cultural rupture between Euro and Mexican-Americans brought on by opposing production and value systems. Besides the sense of liminality, a definite attempt is made to coopt or empower the marginalized Hispanic culture. Furthermore, anticipating the postmodern yet feminism-inspired slogan: "the personal is political," Cortez and Trevino's defiance of Anglo authority, or César Chávez's spiritual conviction, becomes a political statement. The corrido also deconstructs the traditional Anglo-Hispanic framework, reversing the order of privileging, undermining "previously unquestioned postulates of order" (Holman and Harmon 125).

The time of transition between 1849—1910, or the era during which the Chicano is forced into the role of a second-class citizen is the second period in the development of Chicano literature. Following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the corrido remained a popular mode of literary expression, but besides the Anglo-American conflict, such heroes of the Wild West are commemorated as Billy the Kid (Leal and Barrón 19).

The American Southwest had three major cultural centers, New Mexico, Texas and California and out of the three New Mexico remained relatively impenetrable to the Anglo cultural invasion. As Paredes argues, a new culture, neither Mexican, nor Anglo, but a mixture of the two emerged, making it the forerunner of Chicano culture. "1848" also meant the transformation of "the homeland into borderland" as Mexicans remaining in territories ceded to the U.S. confronted the dual pressures of preserving their culture and accepting American mores. Mexican-American literature responded to the cultural, political, and economic deterritorialization by following the corrido tradition; perpetuating events of a cultural conflict, or by emphasizing elements of Spanish culture and using the Spanish language (Paredes 47—48).

The period between 1910—1943 sees the emergence of collective consciousness, demonstrated by the formation of the League of United Latin American Citizens in 1929. The corrido, as shown by a ballad's ethnic pride-driven commemoration of the 1936 coal-strike, remained a popular form of literary expression.(Leal and Barrón 21).

The last stage in the development of Chicano literature lasting from 1943 till the Chicano Renaissance of the late 1960's, early 1970's is characterized by confrontation. "1943" is the reference to the Zoot Suit Riots as a historical materialization of the *pachuco*, the individual who breaks the law as a form of social protest. The ethnic and cultural awakening marked by El Movimiento brought forth the notion of Chicano consciousness and one of its most potent manifestations, poetry.

The Chicano movement is the offspring of Chicano cultural nationalism, which similarly to black nationalism used the weapon of ethnic pride against cultural deterritorialization. Chicano cultural regeneration was fostered by a growing ethnic awareness in the 1960's, the Third World's increasing political importance in the 1950's, the rude awakening of Mexican-American soldiers to Anglo racism countered after their return from World War Two, the institutionalization of Mexican culture following the Mexican revolution, and certain episodes of Mexican history, such as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the independence struggle waged against Spain (Pérez—Torres 64).

The establishment of Chicano cultural identity was sparked by the Delano grape strike. In that event several elements of Hispanic civilization collaborated to provide a formidable ethnic and cultural force. The context of the events, agricultural labor, was not only a representative economic activity of Mexican-Americans, but the migrant worker was one of the keystone images of Hispanic American literature. The strikers marched under the statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a symbol produced by a combination of Euro-American and Pre-Cortesian images.

Furthermore the labor movement seemed to defy the stereotype of the “docile Mexican.” Although the strikers led by Cesar Chávez demanded better wages and the improvement of their working conditions, the events at Delano led to a movement aimed at remedying centuries of historical wrongs. The Delano strike brought on El Movimiento where the former’s “El Plan de Delano” demanding land and justice paved the way toward the emergence of Chicano consciousness.

The Chicano movement was a response to Mexican-American society’s cultural, economic, and political crisis. Chicano consciousness was characterized by the notions of brotherhood, cultural empowerment, maintenance of historical values and sympathy with the oppressed (Anaya 301).

Aztlán

The notion of Aztlán was introduced in 1969 by the Chicano Youth Conference held in Denver. Alberto Alurista’s “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” put forth a program demanding land, political equality and changes in higher education (Pérez—Torres 58). Aztlán functioned as a matrix where two lines of Chicano thought met, one concerning an attempt to change the hostile socio-political system, the other operated on the subjective level aiming to instill ethnic pride (Pérez—Torres 59).

Aztlán, the land of the Seven caves, is the primeval ground from which the ancient Mexicans moved southward in 820 A.D. (Pérez—Torres 57). Chicanos consider themselves the “true descendants of the Fifth Sun, el Quinto Sol.” Out of the four groups to have emerged from Aztlán: Nahuas, Toltecs, Chichimecas and Aztecs, the latter inaugurated the epoch of the Fifth Sun. The arrival of *el Quinto Sol* was preceded by four eras, the age of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. The Fifth Sun represents movement and progress born of man’s sacrifice and reaffirms the existence of a “cosmic spirit,” the alma Chicana (the Chicano soul). William H. Prescott’s *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843) and Alvin M. Josephy Jr.’s *The Indian Heritage of America*

(1968) are the main North American texts testifying to the existence of Aztlán. Prescott compares the move of the Mexica to the Jewish exodus and Josephy admits that the Mexica leaving Aztlán “may even have been in the present-day United States Southwest” (Rendon 8—12). Rendon’s *Chicano Manifesto*, comparing Aztlán in importance to Mesopotamia, identifies the territory as present-day California, Nevada, Arizona, and the Sonora area of Northern Mexico.

According to Anaya the Chicano movement’s invocation of Aztlán supplied a symbol of national unity, established a collective ethnic identity, and provided a homeland. The Mexican-American community deprived of land by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo found a psychological and spiritual remedy for cultural deterritorialization enabling it to be “masters or senores of their own time” (Anaya 371—73).

“1848” pushed Chicanos into “King Arthur’s Court,” thus the imposition of an Anglo-Saxon archetype undermined the communal memory (Anaya 296). Contemporary Chicano experience reflected the Nietzschean prophecy of “man today stripped of myth, famished among all his pasts frantically digging for roots” (Leitch 116). The Aztlán myth emerged from the collective unconscious of the Mexican-American community. Through the naming process Chicanos placed themselves into an archetypal situation in which a loose group of people becomes a true community reflecting “the voice of all mankind” (Leitch 121). Since a myth is a communal response to a spiritual crisis (Anaya 377), the Chicano movement’s solution for the ills of the Mexican-American community was the promotion of Chicano consciousness, the ideology of the New World Person. As Virágos asserts, myths function as barometers of a given culture. The Aztlán myth reflects the social circumstances of culturally dispossessed Chicanos, the collective self-image of a nation destined for ethnic grandeur (49).

Chicano poetry, as an integral part of the “modern poetry of the Americas” has been nurtured by the genre’s major innovators. Walt Whitman’s propensity to argue for “democratic comprehensiveness” and his rejection of artistic conformity functioned as one of the most important influences on modern American poetry. Furthermore, Whitman’s technical achievements, the lack of rhyme and the employment of the free and open verse provide necessary poetic tools for such movimiento poets as Ricardo Sanchez and Abelardo Delgado. Emily Dickinson’s inclusive view “allowing every experience, regardless of how routine or trivial, a place in poetry” left its mark upon Gary Soto and Inez Továr’s work. Jose Martí (1853—1895), the Cuban revolutionary’s political activism, democratic aesthetic, “simple and unadorned forms” made him one of the paragons of the Chicano movement. The Nicaraguan Rubén Darío (1867—1916) is the champion of modernismo, a literary revolt against European artistic values and argues that “change is the only basis of tradition” (Candelaria 22—24).

Poetry became the dominant form of expression for several reasons. It functioned as a modern form of the corrido, a vehicle of cultural resistance itself, it was a shorter, more cost-effective mode of communication, and with the oral readings it provided instant audience feedback. Furthermore its modes of expression matched contemporary literary demands for free verse as Charles Olson defined the poem as “a field of composition” designed for oral performance (Sánchez 18—19). Chicano poetry rests on the following cornerstones: the myth of Aztlán or the Mezo-American homeland, the expression of cultural dispossession, and the notion of interlingualism, or linguistic code switching (Pérez—Torres 6).

Cordelia Candelaria discerns four characteristics of movimiento poetry: traditional literary forms, a prevalence of the imperative mode, an impassioned style, and the domination of prosaic elements. The poets convey their message by contrasting cultural nationalism with universalism, justice with racism, communalism with capitalism, and

pre-Americanism with a Euro-Western worldview (Shirley and Shirley 15).

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez’s “Yo Soy Joaquín” (1967) became the flagship poem of the Chicano movement. Gonzalez, founder of Crusade for Justice, a Denver-based organization, wrote this poem in 1967 to promote Chicano consciousness and political activity. According to the author his purpose was to demonstrate “the psychological wounds, cultural genocide, social castration, nobility, courage, determination and the fortitude to move on to make new history for an ancient people dancing on a modern stage” (Pérez—Torres 70).

The title character, symbolizes the Chicano caught up in the whirlwind of history. The poem is a call to arms for the Chicano movement. Joaquín, integrated into American history due to his valiant conduct in U.S. wars, not only stands for the demonstration of ethnic pride, and of the maintenance of historic roots: “I am Cuahtemoc. Proud and noble leader of men,” but attempts to fight the prevailing stereotypes of Mexican-Americans through the imposition of Aztec and Mayan heroes and demigods in place of the “docile, indolent Mexican.” The poem is an apt manifestation of Chicano consciousness as Joaquín becomes Anaya’s New World Person, an individual emphasizing community needs, radiating ethnic pride, and demanding cultural empowerment. “Yo Soy Joaquín” bears a resemblance to literary works produced during the Harlem Renaissance. Gonzalez’s work corresponds with Langston Hughes’ “Negro” as both poems start with a heartfelt demonstration of ethnic pride, followed by examples of the group’s heroic and turbulent past with the African-American appearing as a slave, worker, and a victim of colonialism and the Mexican-American emerging as an agricultural laborer, a former tyrant, and slave.

Chicano Renaissance or El Movimiento poetry displays three main figures: the “migrant worker,” the *pachuco*, and the *pinto*. The “migrant worker,” a personal manifestation of liminality is present in Abelardo Delgado’s “el inmigrante.” Being exposed to economic and political forces beyond his control, the migrant represents territorial

displacement. As the poet draws a parallel between the sparrows and Mexican migratory patterns two main elements of the migrant experience: territorial dispossession and powerlessness are emphasized (Pérez—Torres 105). Ricardo Sánchez's "migrant lament" presents the "migrant" in a more aggressive light fighting two enemies: the oppressive gringo and the clergy tolerating poverty. In his view the seasonal agricultural laborer becomes an agent in the construction of a new world. Tino Villanueva's "Que hay otra voz" poems provide a detailed description of the migrant laborer's day and present the character as an integral part of nature (Shirley and Shirley 23).

Following Anaya's description of Chicano consciousness, the migrant as a literary figure displays several elements of the New World Person. The shared difficulties, "the sweat day-long dripping into open space/sun blocks the sky" create a sense of brotherhood, and a sympathy for the oppressed. Furthermore, the work in the fields develops an appreciation for nature. The migrant becomes alienated, plagued by an "orphan complex," not being quite home in either culture. However, as an economic actor and a contributor to the sustenance of mainstream America he exuberates ethnic pride, dignity and humanity. The "migrant" is the symbol of economic dislocation and cultural deterritorialization as he works on a land previously owned by his forebears, and sells his labor to support a foreign civilization.

The *pinto*, or the prisoner is the second principal type of Chicano literature. The Mexican-American as a prisoner reflects the violence of Chicano existence. Following the footsteps of Gregorio Cortez and Jacinto Trevino, confrontations and border violence are described, but in this clash between Anglo and Mexican the latter loses. As Pérez—Torres points out while "the migrant" symbolizes the struggle to enter America, drawn by the images of the promised land: the Mexican-American Dream, the pinto experience describes the nightmare, a feeling of being ensnared by America (115).

Ricardo Sánchez speaks loudest of the pinto experience highlighting the feeling of alienation and dehumanization. In "Soledad"

he combines the tenets of Chicano consciousness with the emotional toll of prison life:

soledad,
you lied!
no solitude or serenity here,
just
tormented souls...no,
not souls

The *pinto* as a temporary loser in the cultural conflict is also a rebel emphasizing *carnalismo* (brotherhood), an appreciation of family ties and the desire for freedom (Shirley and Shirley 21). The pinto reflects the notion of Chicano consciousness as it represents Chicano culture entrapped by “mainstream” America. The pinto also symbolizes a multi-level rejection of society at large, as the prisoner is estranged psychologically, personally, and sociologically. The commission of a crime, often under the label of social banditry, indicates a protest against economic deterritorialization. Psychologically it is a form of an individual revolt, and a sacrifice of his body or life assigns him the role of the rebel.

Just as the Chicano is suspended between two cultures, the prisoner represents both psychological and physical liminality functioning between freedom and captivity, social rejection and acceptance. The pinto experience also acts as a catalyst towards education demonstrated by Jimmy Santiago Baca, who turned to learning to deal with the dehumanizing cruelty of prison life to achieve “a birthing, a way out through poetry.”

Thus in a way the pinto experience is centripetal, as individuals heretofore on the periphery are prompted by conditions of captivity to acquire an education enabling them to create literary products, leading to a participation in a multicultural literary world. The pinto is a multicultural hero functioning at the faultline between the colonizer and the colonized.

While the literary image of the “migrant” emphasizes his humanity, and integration into nature, the prisoner is separated from nature desperately struggling to preserve his human dignity. The “migrant” symbolizes economic deterritorialization, the pinto stands for social alienation, and the *pachuco* functions as a cultural rebel.

The figure of the *pachuco* sporting a specific hairstyle, clad in distinctive oversized suits and flamboyant hats, reflects cultural separation. The very name, a *calo* designation of El Paso, anticipates a special jargon not accessible to Anglo-Americans. The debate over the origin of the term anticipates the role of Chicano culture as a bridge between numerous cultures. “Pachuco” can be interpreted as a Nahuatl (Aztec) expression for the residence of a chief, and a Spanish term indicating something being overripe (Pérez—Torres 288). The first version emphasizes the movement’s historical links, a sort of invocation of “mythic memory,” and being overripe could refer to the patterns of cultural dispossession and economic segregation prompting the outbreak of the movement.

The physical appearance is a rebellion against mainstream America’s organized social order, the criminal activity, as the *pachuco* is the loosely defined equivalent of Anglo-American juvenile delinquents, represents the rejection of the mores of the dominant society. However, of greatest importance is his cultural stance as “the *pachuco* movement was one of the few truly separatist movements in American history” (Pérez—Torres 124).

While the “migrant” emerges from south of the border, and the pinto derives his existence from the violence of the border, the *pachuco* is the product of the barrio, a manifestation of cultural, economic, and physical ghettoization within the border. The *pachuco* rebels against cultural dispossession by fashioning a style of apparel, a language, and a search for linkage with Mexican-American history. He is the forerunner of Chicano consciousness as he “does not want to become a Mexican again, at the same time he doesn’t want to blend into the life of North America either. His whole being is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma” (Shirley and Shirley 86).

Jose Montoya's "El Louie" describes the pachuco experience through a eulogy written upon the death of one *vato loco*, a young rebel who, despite his proud, defiant attitude and declared cultural independence dies in wretched solitude. Louie desires to become a moral example for his community, but as his attempts at assimilation into Anglo-America are frustrated, he turns to a self-destructive lifestyle.

By the late 1980's the meaning of Aztlán has been shifted from the original declaration of cultural independence and Alurista's reclamation of a homeland to images of a transitory world. Jimmmy Santiago Baca's "Black Mesa Poems" present Aztlán not as a return home but as a "nomadic passage" (Pérez—Torres 84), and Lorna Dee Cervantes' "Poem for a Young Man..." (1981) demonstrates a new interpretation of liminality:

I try. I go to my land, my tower of words and
bolt the door, but the typewriter doesn't fade out
the sounds of blasting and muffled outrage.
My own days bring me slaps on the face.
Every day I am deluged with reminders
that this is not
my land
and this is my land (Lauter 3102).

The Evolution of the Chicano Novel

Josephina Niggli's *Mexican Village* (1948), born of the tradition of Mexican literary romanticism, with its protagonist completing a nostalgic journey to discover the therapeutic effects of the Mexican-American past is the forerunner of the Chicano novel and the first work written by a Mexican-American to reach the Anglo reading public (Elliott 804). While the 1947 publication of Mario Suarez's short stories in the *Arizona Quarterly* titled "Senor Garza" and "Kid Zopilote" indicate the appearance of the first Chicano writer, José Antonio

Villareal's *Pocho* (1959) marks the emergence of the first Chicano novel. The protagonist, Richard Rubio's statement: "I do not want to be somebody. I am," not only functions as a reaffirmation of cultural and personal independence but reflects the power of language to constitute a "state of suggestive integrity" (Saldivar 18). *Pocho* is the quintessential Chicano novel and its influence is felt at several stages of Chicano fiction. Tomás Rivera's *y no se lo trago la tierra* (1971) commemorates a year in a life of a migrant worker family seen from the eye of an unnamed young boy. The book, besides its portrayal of physical and spiritual exploitation, testifies to la Raza's indomitable will to survive (Saldivar 20). Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima* (1972) is another milestone in the evolution of the Chicano novel validating Mexican-American culture beyond the Southwest. Its protagonist, Antonio Marez is caught between the pressures of different parental expectations, as his mother wants him to become a priest and his father urges him to maintain the vaquero tradition of his family. Antonio's dilemma is solved by the appearance of Ultima, a folk healer who shows him the way to become a writer, thus a preserver of both traditions (Lauter 2583). The novel is rich in Mexican-American folk imagery introducing such elements as *la llorona*, the vailing woman of the rivers, and promotes the image of Antonio as Odysseus caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of the cloth and the lariat (Rogers 200). Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) deconstructs the American legal system as "an arbitrary weaving of semantic threads created to hide the empty forms of notions such as 'justice' and 'natural rights'" (Saldivar 23). Ron Arias' *The Road to Tamazunchale* (1975) is an example of the combination of North American literature with Latin American themes, as the protagonist Fausto is taken from East Los Angeles to Peru on a quest to reach his mythical destination. His description of Tamazunchale reminds the reader of Aztlán: "It is our home. Once we're there, we're free, we can be everything and everyone."

The Beginnings of Chicano Theatre

The formation of Luis Valdez' *El Teatro Campesino* (1965) marks the beginning of the Chicano drama as a promoter of ethnic awareness and political action. In Valdez's view theatre serves as the arm of "revolutionary nationalism" and is a means of popular education (Shirley and Shirley 68). *El Teatro Campesino* performed short sketches, called *actos* dealing with such issues pertinent to the migrant worker community as discrimination and unfair labor conditions in the form of the morality play. The establishment of *El Centro Campesino Cultural* in 1967 shifted the Mexican-American theatre's attention from local issues and presented the Chicano as a global historical actor taking part in the oppressed's struggle toward social and economic improvement (Shirley and Shirley 73--74). The Vietnam War *actos* in 1971 concentrated on Chicano participation in that Southeast Asian conflict. Also, in the 1970's, the *míto*, a new form of expression emerges invoking the legend of Aztlán (Elliott 1114). Valdez's full-length play "El Corrido" describing the ordeals of migrant workers substitutes traditional stage narration with a singer of *canciones de los pobres* (songs of the poor; Leal and Barrón 11). "Zoot Suit" dedicated to Mexican-Americans suffering a miscarriage of justice in "The Sleepy Lagoon Case" exposes the prejudicial treatment Chicanos received in the Anglo legal system following the infamous Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 (Pérez—Torres 109). "No Saco Nada de la Escuela" (I Don't Get Anything out of School" (1969) highlights Chicano alienation in the Anglo educational system (Elliott 1114).

Chicano Aesthetics

Chicano aesthetics, driven by the twin impulses of cultural regeneration and ethnic pride, following the Aztecs' prescription for achieving "true Toltec" status opposite to "carrion artists," emphasizes the importance of personal experiences (Rothenberg 12). The Mexican-American artist not only has to function as the voice of the barrio, but

must make the Chicano aware of his social surroundings along with his valuable historic heritage. Whereas Amiri Baraka viewed the black aesthetics as a cultural agent in the destruction of the Anglo social and political order, Chicano aesthetics' revolutionary nationalism aims at the spiritual sphere. Aztlán does not promote anti-Anglo violence, but affirms cultural and historic roots. Contrary to the centrifugal dynamics of black aesthetics, its Chicano counterpart displays centripetal tendencies. Instead of "teaching white men their deaths and cracking their faces open to the mad cries of the poor" (Baker 90), Chicano aesthetics struggles to create the New World Person, a global, historic actor taking part in the oppressed's struggle for social and economic improvement.

Villareal's "Clemente Chacon" reinforces this centripetality: "I am a Mexican and I am an American and there is no reason in the world why I can't be both" (Shirley and Shirley 101). On the other hand Max Martinez echoes the views of Baraka and is close to cultural disengagement in his description of the Chicano as a "bronze skinned avenger" (Shirley and Shirley 154). Similarly, Oscar Zeta Acosta's notion of the Chicano as a "brown buffalo" firmly embedded in an Aztec-Mexican cultural context rejects Judeo-Christianity referring to Jesus as "strung-up man," and searches for ethnic identity demanding a name and language for his race (Shirley and Shirley 169).

Martinez views Chicano culture in a dyad with the colonizer Anglo civilization. The "bronze skin" is not only a reference to the Brown Power Movement but an invocation of the heroic Aztec past. The "avenger" is a Hispanic superhero who as an equivalent to his numerous Anglo counterparts demonstrates the viability of Chicano culture. Acosta's "brown buffalo" carries a double meaning as well, as besides an obvious reference to the physical appearance of Mexican-Americans, the notion of the buffalo, the basic source of sustenance for Native Americans virtually made extinct, establishes a link with the Amerindian world.

Whereas contrary to its African-American counterpart Chicano aesthetics follows the guidelines of the discipline more closely, its

search for artistic beauty is foregrounded in political and cultural activism. The notion of therapeutic self-justification is present in Anaya's invocation of Aztlán as a remedy for a cultural, economic, and social crisis. Furthermore a "versus pattern" can also be discerned in the movement's placement of Chicano artistic production against Anglo literary criticism and raising the issue whether Anglo views can be relevant concerning Chicano literature. In 1976 Lomelí and Urioste argued that "the uniqueness of Chicano reality is such that non-Chicanos rarely capture it like it is" (Shirley and Shirley 174).

Consequently, writers looking at the Chicano experience from the outside were categorized under the label "literatura chicanesca" (Shirley and Shirley 174). While Black Aesthetics operates in the conative mode hoping that it would will a better, more just world into existence through artistic activity, Chicano aesthetics has been more realistic being aware of the fact that the "invocation of a mythic memory" would not do away with social and cultural deterritorialization.

The traditional view of Chicano literature, or any minority literature, however, has to be revised. Whereas one would assign labels of centrifugality or centripetality at face value, a closer examination of American culture would reveal that these terms are context specific. Chicano literature displays both centrifugality and centripetality. If one identifies the Anglo world as core America, then Martinez's "bronze skinned avenger," or Acosta's "brown buffalo" suggest centrifugality, shifting Mexican-American consciousness further from the center. However, as Virágos argues a sound and healthy democratic society displays a primary core surrounded by several secondary cores (Diagnosing... 29). Consequently, Martinez and Acosta's views are centrifugal only in relation to the primary core, and centripetal vis a vis the secondary core, Hispanic America. Similarly the notion of Aztlán, a declaration of cultural independence, and Rendon's reclamation of territory appear to be in a centrifugal relationship with Anglo-America, and perform a centripetal function within the Chicano community.

Chicano literature is a multicultural, postmodern cultural product. Its description of the Mexican-American experience at the rupture of Anglo and Mexican civilization places it in the category of resistant multiculturalism. It also describes a process during which the homeland becomes the borderland, entrapping the Chicano in a dilemma of opposing cultural demands assigning him the role of the "intercultural interpreter" (Pérez—Torres 141).

In Reedway Dasenbrock's view literature has to meet two conditions in order to be qualified multicultural: an ability to perpetuate the experiences of multicultural societies along with being able "to inscribe the readers from other cultures inside their own textual dynamics" (Pérez—Torres 145). Chicano society is clearly multicultural demonstrated by its history and its function as a bridge spanning over several civilizations. Dasenbrock's second criterion prescribes an educational function to literature and Mexican-American literature's emphasis on ethnic pride through the revelation of the elements of a heroic, "usable past" adequately serves this purpose. Furthermore, Chicano literature meets Homi Bhabha's requirements of a multicultural mode of literary production being a movement between two or more cultural practices "without negating the positions and contradictions of power in those practices" (Pérez—Torres 57). As it was demonstrated neither its predecessor, the corrido, nor "El Movimiento" poetry itself aimed to eliminate cultural barriers between Anglos and Mexican-Americans, rather they strove for the illustration of the inequalities embedded in the status quo.

Chicano poetry, displaying three main characteristics: the use of a "strange and minor" language reflecting cultural deterritorialization, an overtly social and political function, and the promotion of collective consciousness, also corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari's thesis concerning minor literatures (Pérez—Torres 216). The employment of *calo* or *pocho* and a frequent switching of linguistic codes, the migrant, prisoner, and rebel as agents of cultural empowerment along with the

establishment of a new paradigm, the New World Person, provide added reinforcement.

Chicano literature aims to break out of the oppressive boundaries set by Anglo literature, fighting the harmful effects of cultural and political deterritorialization, putting forth the image of a New World Person thus promoting a minority consciousness. However, it not only describes the experience of a community aiming for cultural empowerment amidst contradicting impulses, but through an emphasis on spiritual awareness and insistence on democratic principles (Anaya 382) it offers a worthwhile goal to follow for all mankind.

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GABRIELLA VARRÓ

THE THEME OF COMIC LOVE IN BLACKFACE
MINSTRELSY: THE ANATOMY OF THE GROTESQUE

The past thirty or so years have seen a considerable upsurge in blackface minstrelsy's criticism. A lot of scholarly attention has been devoted to contemplating various aspects (racial, class, gender, political, cultural, etc.) connected with this once popular and influential form of the American theater. Among the most frequently debated issues is the racial aspect of minstrelsy, which also appears to be the major source of its recent appeal. This has resulted in a relative neglect of aesthetic considerations, which, however, should not be divorced from the concomitant issues of race, class, and gender. Thus it was inevitable that while attending to the central problems of race and class in early blackface, recent critics of minstrelsy should also touch upon aesthetic aspects such as mimicry (Berndt Ostendorf), misrepresentation (Sam Dennison, Robert Toll), counterfeit (Eric Lott), as well as the related issues of burlesque, travesty and parody. As a result, a whole spate of aesthetic terminology has by now sprung up with no one volunteering to sort out the various categories, or interpret them with regard to their special relevance in minstrelsy. The present study is intended as a preliminary attempt to reflect upon the complexity of aesthetic inquiries into minstrelsy, and it will also chart out options for further research along these lines.

The aesthetic quality addressed in this paper is the *grotesque*, which many have identified as instrumental in the production and subsequent proliferation of the minstrel image and stereotypes. The following analysis will highlight some layers and aspects of the minstrel performance where the *grotesque* played a major role; and for lack of space I will concentrate exclusively on one minstrel theme popularized widely in thousands of minstrel lyrics (one of the most fertile grounds for the analysis of the *grotesque*), that of comic love.

1. THE GROTESQUE IN LITERATURE VERSUS THE MINSTREL GROTESQUE

The heart and soul of the *grotesque* as a universal aesthetic quality is ambivalence, ambiguity or paradox, mostly resulting from distortion of the normal. From its beginnings, the *grotesque* was understood as a branch of the comic, which conjoined two apparently incongruous and disparate qualities, something threatening and benign at one and the same time. In literature, the *grotesque* always denotes a “disjunctive image, scene, or larger structure, composed of comic-horrific elements or otherwise irreconcilable parts” (Barasch 560). In literary history this base definition has gone through various shifts and changes and, inevitably, various times and periods interpreted and utilized this core definition in many different ways.

The *grotesque* is claimed to have originated with the Dionysian festivals in ancient Greece, “where celebrants dressed as satyrs ... sang abusive songs in the belief that degradation and destructions would assure birth and renewal” (Barasch 560). These basic destruction-renewal and degeneration-regeneration dichotomies were further expanded in Roman mime theater, where the comic love theme as an endless source of *grotesque* possibilities already reached the stage. Quite interestingly, this Roman mime theater seems to have possessed almost all the necessary ingredients for *grotesque* theater which later the minstrels were to incorporate in their expressive repertoire. Besides the *grotesque theme* (mostly farcical plots dealing with love),

this type of theater also employed “bestial masks and used exaggerated gestures, grimaces and obscene body language” (Barasch 560), as well as stock characters of various sorts. Here, for the first time in literary history, we might see a long line of *grotesque paraphernalia*: stock characters, masks, gestures and grimaces, which the 19th-century minstrel theater was to incorporate next (clearly entirely irrespective of and independently of the heritage of the Roman theater).

By the Middle Ages this aesthetic quality had infiltrated a widening spectrum of literary forms and types, and thus the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the rise of bawdy tales and roguish jests primarily through the stories of Boccaccio and Chaucer. Among the new *grotesque character types* we witness the emergence of comic sinners, tricksters, dupes, many of whom “convey animalistic images harbored within the varied forms of mankind” (Barasch 561). The thematic realm of the *grotesque* also broadened while the 15th century was going to introduce its chivalric romances about the struggle between the monstrous and the beautiful, which finally coalesced in the paradigm of the beauty and the beast. The war between good and evil for the soul of man discussed in the morality plays is probably one of the most elemental representations of the essence of the *grotesque* through literary history.

The Renaissance period with its literary innovations of *grotesque techniques, style and genres* is most likely the age to which we should turn to look for the actual sources of the minstrel genre. This period’s great inventions in terms of the *grotesque* are exaggeration (which the minstrel theater is going to be founded upon through its exaggeration of character, speech, and situation), the appearance of the horrific-comic style, and ambivalence as the keyword to understand *grotesque* logic (Barasch 562). To what extent and how these European, predominantly French and English, innovations could be influential on 19th-century blackface theater is almost impossible to trace here;¹

¹ Theories of intercontinental borrowings are at best dubious and questionable, and also without historical documentation to support their arguments. Two facts can be

similarities between these stylistic and technical phenomena might simply be accidental or casual. Not so, however, with the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, a theatrical tradition often identified as the origin of the minstrel stage.²

Although the *grotesque* features and qualities present in the *commedia* were mostly borrowings from classical plays and times (such as the stock characters: the parasite, the servant, lovers, the braggart soldier it imported from antiquity, or the exaggerated style it borrowed from medieval and ancient farce [Barasch 563]), yet the *commedia* also brought in novel elements to be mixed into the idea of the *grotesque*, which later would be of major import in the *minstrel grotesque* as well. These were the introduction of regional dialect in an exaggerated manner to denote rural character types (a method later applied in the construction of the minstrel dialect), the emergence of comic and *grotesque props* (to be discussed separately), and grotesque dance numbers, as well as novel *grotesque commedia* scenarios.

The next, and probably final, stage in the cultural history of the *grotesque*, echoes of which are going to be found in the minstrel *grotesque*, was the rise of the *gothic-grotesque* in the 18th and 19th centuries all over Europe and later in America (see Charles Brockden Brown, Poe, Melville, Hawthorne). In this distinct type of the *grotesque* (applied in Europe chiefly by German and English masters such as Büchner, Klinger, Blake, Coleridge) comedic techniques were put to tragic purpose, “and the old carnival fun [relevant in previous grotesque representations] ... [was] replaced by the threatening quality of the grotesque” (Barasch 566). This latter, gloomier aspect of the

ascertained at this point, one, that from the 17th century on several European plays and novels reached America, and were either adopted to the American stage or circulated in book form; and, two, that there are certain universals in the development of human ideas (thoughts, styles, ways of expression) which occur simultaneously throughout the world because of the similarities in human or social formation, history and cultural development. For a more detailed analysis of “universalism” see George Rehin’s “Harlequin...” 682—701.

² For more on the *commedia dell'arte* origins of blackface minstrelsy see Rehin’s “Harlequin,” and Richard Moody’s “Negro Minstrelsy.”

grotesque evolving with the literature of the gothic accentuating the horrific and the demonic as opposed to the lightly humorous, was again a tendency later reinvented in certain motifs of the minstrel genre.

And thus this sketchy (and apparently incomplete) account of the historical development of the literary *grotesque* takes us to the America of the early 19th century, where the blackface minstrel established, invented or reinvented yet another distinct branch of the *grotesque*, the so-called *minstrel grotesque*.

Before attempting a tentative working definition of the *minstrel grotesque*, however, certain conceptual or theoretical questions need to be addressed. As can be seen in the above historical survey of the *literary grotesque*, the term has been applied through the centuries to denote rather varied aspects of literary creation: essentially an aesthetic quality signifying external as well as inner properties of the art work projected (applicable to character, theme, structure, content, idea, motif, or tone alike); yet, it was also linked with a variety of literary forms and styles, techniques as well as modes of representation.

With the rise of modern and postmodern literary theory, critics have begun to look upon the *grotesque* not exclusively as an aesthetic quality and artistic method of representation, but as an ideology, concept or structure that penetrates the author's mind, and brings about psychological dualities in the artist's mind and work (see Schlegel, Jean Paul). Theorists of the reader-response school, on the other hand, applied the *grotesque* to generate theories about simultaneous controversial responses to literary texts. Thus, *grotesque* as an aesthetic principle, a conceptual framework and an essential structural idea have by now penetrated the whole terrain of the literary culture: art, artist and audience alike.

Beyond the literary sphere of reference, the *grotesque* has also been seen as a term applicable to subliterary forms of (artistic) expression; and it has also been applied to express a world view, or a philosophy of culture and society. Therefore in the following analysis of the *minstrel grotesque* it is essential to distinguish at least three basic designations of the term: (a) the *minstrel grotesque* as a literary

phenomenon; (b) the *minstrel grotesque* as a subliterate or popular cultural ideology, and (c) the *minstrel grotesque* as world view or philosophy of culture and society.

(A) THE MINSTREL GROTESQUE AS A LITERARY PHENOMENON

Minstrelsy can be perceived as a component of the American literary culture, thus minstrel lyrics, characters, themes and the style it established can all be investigated along predominantly aesthetic lines. The *minstrel grotesque* in this basically aesthetic analysis is to signify all *grotesque* elements, features and characteristics which appear in early blackface minstrelsy, and which show striking similarities with several earlier-mentioned *grotesques* (in terms of style, character, technique, quality and mode) that occurred throughout pre-minstrel literary history. This is, however, not to claim that the *minstrel grotesque* was in any way directly indebted to these earlier representations, besides, of course, the quite distinct and historically ascertained *commedia* roots.

On the more general level, the category of the *minstrel grotesque* as a predominantly aesthetic quality is to signify all the literary minstrel phenomena in which a unique variation from the normal can be perceived. Thus, formal distortions of the natural are present in it as (1) ambiguous or ambivalent elements, features, characteristics, concepts, ideologies such as the ugly and laughable, the distorted/deformed and the attractive, the pleasure-giving and disgusting are combined in it for comic purposes; (2) it links with the bizarre, strange and unusual, fearsome and demonic aspect of the grotesque (an aspect that leads back to the terminology and phenomena of the *gothic-grotesque*)³ (3) the technique of "exaggeration beyond caricature [is] carried [in it] to fantastic extremes" (a concept of Schneegans described in Makaryk

³ See Wolfgang Kayser on the "gothic-grotesque," a cultural as well as literary theory, where he sees the grotesque as "a structure of the estranged world," the primary purpose of which is "to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world" (Makaryk 88).

88). These three broad areas of incongruity within the *grotesque* are to be remembered in the subsequent discussion of particular manifestations.

(B) THE MINSTREL GROTESQUE AS SUBLITERARY PHENOMENON AND IDEOLOGY

Minstrelsy in this interpretation is more a phenomenon of the rich store of 19th-century American subliterate culture than a mode of literary expression. However, viewing minstrelsy purely as popular art without any pretense at refinement is, as it were, the traditional “reading” of the phenomenon. A branch of popular entertainment “for the people by the people” was one of the basic slogans upon which the minstrel stage was founded.

Karl Friedrich Flögel, the first theoretician to see the *grotesque* manifested in subliterate forms, found several examples of it in low burlesque and farce over the centuries. His “tea-kettle” theory, according to which “the subliterate grotesque expressed an essential need of mankind to find comic relief from the monotony of work by letting off steam through indulgence in the crude pleasures of carnival festivity” (Makaryk 86), is also applicable to minstrel performances and audiences, although here an important component of institutionalized comic relief was embedded in social tension that grew out of the racial controversies of the day, rather than viewer anxieties created by work.

Minstrelsy analyzed along these lines can easily be seen firstly as the minstrel performer’s flight from the contemporaneous problems of race and class, and his indulgence in carnivalesque fun through the image of the physically deformed and mentally disfigured darky and, secondly, minstrel stages offered an easy outlet for minstrel audiences, who were also welcome to the fun through the enjoyment of the cruel and often aberrant imagery.

Thus in minstrelsy the Flögelean *grotesque* operates in two channels simultaneously: giving comic relief to the minstrel performer whose escape from the tensions of the time was secured through the

“comic-horrific” image he turned himself into; while minstrel audiences could let the steam off by laughing at and also pitying the image presented.

(C) THE MINSTREL GROTESQUE AS A WORLD VIEW AND A PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

As noted by critics, minstrelsy, as an institutionalized form of popular theater played a major role in spreading popular ideologies of culture and society, and therefore functioned essentially as a shaper of the popular social consciousness and of the cultural awareness of the masses. Ostendorf, for instance, sees minstrelsy as “a symbolic slave code, a set of humiliating rules designed by white racists for the disenfranchisement of the black self” (66); Toll describes it as “the first example of the way American popular culture would exploit and manipulate Afro-Americans and their culture to please and benefit white Americans” (51); while Saxton has called it “half a century of inurement to the uses of white supremacy” (27); and examples could be quoted endlessly to prove that blackface minstrelsy clearly worked as a philosophy of culture (a cultural and also social and political ideology) through which the dominance of white cultural and political practices was reassured and rehearsed in code.

What should be obvious in this connection is that we are witnessing a sort of ideological game in minstrelsy. One way of understanding ideology is through looking at the repertoire of images, themes and ideas disseminated for broad public consumption by and for the dominant culture. In American culture, where a multitude of priorities have existed but not all of them prevailed, the very process of institutionalized or semi-institutionalized selection of images for a wide public audience (via, for instance, the minstrel network) was strongly reflective of interests and commitments determined mostly from above. Thus the selective process—along with its concomitant repudiation and subversion of alternative frames of reference (i.e. its suppression of the counter-culture)—has always been, intrinsically ideological.

Minstrelsy as a public theory of culture and society is closest to Bakhtin's view of the *grotesque*, where "the comic aspect of the folk carnival [is endowed] with meaningful philosophical content that expresses utopian ideals of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" ((Makaryk 88). This is a theory also strangely present in the conceptual framework of the minstrel show, which suggested acculturation, assimilation, and intermixture as possible cultural and political alternatives for Blacks, while in actuality it strongly moved against these "threatening" processes. Under the guise of these utopistic cultural principles, the blackface actor was given sufficient freedom to do whatever he pleased with the pseudo-black stage image or the pseudo-cultural baggage he was supposed to carry.

* * *

Having observed the most essential manifestations and varieties of the *minstrel grotesque*, I will bring this analysis to more practical grounds, illustrating its concrete realizations through the minstrel lyrics. Concrete examples will be brought primarily to indicate the embodiments of the *literary minstrel grotesque* from the theme of comic love alone. Analysis will thus include the characters involved in the comic love theme; physical manifestations; bizarre props and costumes; plots and happenings; and further areas of the *minstrel grotesque* such as mask, language, and dance. References to wider aspects of the *minstrel grotesque* will be made throughout the following review, incorporating the subliterate, social, cultural and racial domains that minstrelsy and the aesthetics qualities linked to it also penetrate.

2. GROTESQUE CHARACTERS OF THE COMIC LOVE THEME

Besides the two well-established stereotypes popularized by minstrel stages, the Happy Plantation Darky and the Northern Dandy

Darky, the most memorable and lasting *grotesques*⁴ on the minstrel stage came out of the theme of *comic love*. From the many comic love clichés that came to be paraded on the minstrel stages all across America, I will focus on the character of the Ugly Female, while also noting the strong presence of two further stereotypes entering the stage with the comic love songs of minstrelsy, and accompanying the figure of the *Ugly Female*: the *Jealous Black Lover* and the *Seducer*.

The primary source of the *grotesque* quality in these character portraits was physical deformity which was vicariously conveyed to the public by means of the minstrel lyrics, or through direct visualization: the images of the sheet music covers and the very appearance of the minstrel performer. While the physical deformity of the male characters was not new to minstrel audiences, since the two core stereotypes were also built largely upon *physical grotesque*, the comic love theme introduced the black female in addition, to serve as the butt of minstrel jokes.

Although much of the humor of the comic love theme derived from situation comedy, the stereotype of the Ugly Female was largely built upon physical ridicule, similarly to the characters of the Happy Plantation Darky and the Dandy Darky. Besides the ludicrous situations the black female was caught up in by the side of her black lover and her secret suitor, the black female was often parodied because of her alleged physical defects. Interestingly enough, as Sam Dennison observes, the exaggerated physical features of the black female were frequently perceived as adding to, rather than decreasing, the desirability of the black woman (Dennison 117).

*Her form was round, her step was light —
But, wan't her bustle heavy?*⁵

⁴ "Grotesques" here denotes all the stereotypes represented on the minstrel stages, whose grotesqueness was due to a curious mixture of physical and also often mental deformity and ridiculousness.

⁵ "The Yaller Gal With A Josey On" quoted in Dennison 120.

The *grotesqueness* of the black female's physical appearance was extended to every feature of her body. Songsmiths left not a single body part intact from ridicule. A recurring cliché of the character was her oversized body, feet and mouth. The fatness of the female body was contemplated in many a minstrel song. "The Ole Gray Goose," for instance, described the size of Miss Dinah Rose's body in such exaggerated manner: "she war by gosh so berry fat/ I couldn't sit beside her" (Starr)⁶.

Most Ugly Female jokes revolved around the black female's facial features (specified, for instance, as a "sooty 'plexion" in one version of "Old Dan Tucker"), the color of her eyes, lips and teeth (e.g. "her teef was like de clar grit snow/ And her eyes like dem beans dat shine from de Moon/ sharper dan de teef of de Possum and de Koon," in "Who's Dat Nigga..."), the size of the mouth, the lips and the teeth (e.g. "Her lips war big, she could sing like a pig,/ Her mouth stretched from ear to ear" in "In De Wild Rackoon Track"⁷). A considerable number of wild metaphors applied to characterize facial features used animal similes underlining the alleged animality of the black female in a manner similar to the treatment of the pseudo black male of minstrelsy. Other similes directed attention to the sexual appeal of the black female. In a popular version of "Lubly Fan Will You Come Out To Night?,"⁸ in the Starr Collection, pieces the black female's lips are made

⁶ References to "Starr" indicate a quote from the Starr Sheet Music Collection's minstrel lyrics at Indiana University's Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana.

⁷ "Old Dan Tucker," "Who's Dat Nigga" and "In De Wild Rackoon Track" all quoted in Dennison 122—3, and 134—5.

⁸ "Lubly Fan" Brown University, Harris Collection, no. 39. In Starr. M1.S8, Afro-Americans before 1863. The song, according to the Brown University notes for the piece, is evidently the long-lost original of the "Bowery Gals." It was written by Cool White, the year after he had organized the Virginia Serenaders, and it was sung by his banjoist, Jim Carter. Nobody seems to know why it was as "Buffalo Gals" that the song became famous. It is sung by Jim in chapter II of *Tom Sawyer* (Brown Library Notes).

to resemble the “oyster plant,” a picture phrasing the sexual implications inherent in the black female figure rather explicitly.

The presence of the very real threat of sexual “amalgamation” or racial mixing between the black female and the white male was too close to everyday realities, and therefore was cautiously avoided by songsmiths. Instead, songwriters did their best to prove the black female undesirable and unattractive at every possible turn, a strategy already familiar from minstrel representations of the Dandy Darky character. To make a feature undesirable, songsmiths often turned to the method of exaggeration, and thus the *grotesque* came to life. Eyes, noses, ears, lips, mouths came to be enlarged over the limit. The enormous size of the black female’s feet was also a favorite topic of Ugly Female songs, and it is quite amazing how inventive songsmiths grew on the subject. “Lubly Fan” had feet that “covered up de whole side-walk” leaving no room for her suitor, the heroine of “Who’s Dat Nigga,” Miss Dinah Crow could pride herself over such a gigantic foot that “when it dropt it was death to all creeping insects.” Similarly disastrous effects resulted from the heels of Ugly Females described in songs such as “What A Heel She’s Got Behind Her” (Dennison 125) or “The Ole Gray Goose.” Miss Dinah Rose of the latter song, unlike many of her Ugly Female counterparts, did not feel even a little sore over her bodily disadvantage, to the contrary:

*Says I to her: you Dinah Gal
Only looky dar
Dem heels are sticking out too far
As a niggas I declar.*

*Says she to me, you nigger Jo
What are you about
Dere’s science in dem are heels
And I want em to stick out.
/Starr/*

Probably the most vicious of all attacks minstrels launched on their female characters, was the imagery describing the characteristic odor of the female body. This notion was founded upon a "widespread belief among whites" that blacks had a strong, unpleasant smell (Dennison 124), while willingly forgetting the possibility that their own body odors might disturb blacks very much the same way. "Ginger Blue," described this commonly held stereotype through the representation of the black female:

Wid de nigga wenches ob de inhabitation

De gals looked well,

My eyes what a smell...

/Dennison 124/

The Ugly Black Female of minstrelsy like her male counterpart was a composition of *grotesque bodily features* from head to toe, therefore undesirable yet somehow exotic and strangely alluring, comic and repellent at the same time. The magnification and distortion of body parts went to such lengths that the image reached the borderline of the horrific. Although minstrel imagery sometimes did express this horror at the sight of the black female, it was more the sheet music covers which reflected this aspect of the *grotesque*, where the image of the alleged black female approximated the inhuman and the ape-like. The cover illustration of "Coal Black Rose" (the first comic love song in minstrelsy discussed later in more detail) depicted the pseudo-black female as an ape attired in beautiful costume, where confrontation between body and dress, the ideal female and the vulgar pseudo-black female, horror and comedy manifested the very essence of the *grotesque*. This depiction of the black female as a composite of startling and often even disgusting features later came to be standard in the comic black female imagery of the coon songs of the 1880s. Still somewhat later several characteristics of the Ugly Female were transformed into the mammy character of vaudeville stages, cartoons, postcards, and a variety of popular paraphernalia.

The third “vehicle” (besides minstrel lyrics and sheet music covers) that brought the *physical grotesque* of minstrelsy into the spotlight was the minstrel performer himself. As Toll and several other critics of minstrelsy note, the mainstream of minstrelsy was all-male even in the 1860s and 70s (139), and therefore female roles were traditionally acted out by male performers. Minstrel transvestism or the wench role, as it is popularly known, was introduced by the great masters of minstrelsy such as Barney Williams and George Christy (to whom the first song of this kind, “Lucy Long” is attributed), and later by Francis Leon, who was one of the most popular actors in this genre, and who was frequently taken for a member of the female sex because of his ingenious imitations.

The notion of the minstrel “wench,” that is, the blackface male minstrel cross-dressing as a “sweet young thing” flirting and forcing beaux to steal kisses from “her” (Toll 140), was by itself the very embodiment of the *grotesque*. Here the binary opposition, which is at the heart of the *grotesque*, came full circle. The minstrel performer posing as the *ne plus ultra* of female sensuality was both repulsive and strangely attractive, familiar yet distant and different in a bizarre manner, comic as well as sadly deformed, male and female at the same time.

Although, as Toll observes, the prima donna or wench role was different from the low-comedy burlesque female role (of the Ugly pseudo-black female), it being “played seriously by an elegantly dressed performer in a very delicate manner” (140), *grotesque* deformity was undeniably part and parcel of this role.

Eric Lott goes much further in his interpretation of the wench character of minstrelsy. He analyzes minstrel transvestism as an expression of the “white men’s fear of female power,” which was overcome through the act of cross-dressing. “The attraction of all such representations,” Lott declares, “appears to consist in portraying

‘masculinized,’ powerful women, not in order to submit but, through the pleasurable response, to take the power back” (161).⁹

It is hard to judge with any certainty what exactly was dramatized, inferred and acted out in the wench acts (whether taking into account the performer or the reaction and feelings of their audience); some note only the rarity or strangeness of the act (Toll), others like Lott go further to bring in psychosexual arguments about the homoerotic appeal or the white male’s need to take the power back from women as inherent in such acts. Whichever interpretation we might accept, the *physical grotesque* in the phenomenon can undoubtedly be ascertained, and as for the racial, class and gender issues contained, it should suffice at this point to note their ambivalence, and complexity (which, however, might only be a result of projecting such implications into the act by late 20th-century observers).¹⁰

3. GROTESQUE ELEMENTS IN THE MINSTREL PROPS

Although minstrel props can easily be seen as part of the physical appearance of the minstrel performer, I intend to separate the biological from the cultural by divorcing the intrinsically bodily features of representation from objects attached to the body, essentially because

⁹ Eric Lott devotes a whole subchapter in his book *Love and Theft...* to the wench character, analyzing it both along gender as well as racial lines of inquiry. Besides seeing this character as an apparent manifestation of the white man’s frustrations in regard to womanhood as well as his own masculinity, Lott also believes that the wench role offered ways “to demystify [the] black men’s sexuality” as well as to express “white male desire for black men” (163), and in a true cavalcade of varied impulses of desire, hate, identification, rejection and need to annihilate rival and potential sexual mate, the familiar irony of race presented itself. “[T]he act derided white America for its fascination with blacks while at the same time it marketed the fascination. Surely this structure of feeling,” Lott claims, “evidences again the precariousness or dissonance or conflictedness that marked white people’s sense of their own whiteness” (166).

¹⁰ On the ambivalence of racial issues treated in minstrelsy see Ostendorf 65—94, and Lott’s *Love and Theft*.

of the complexity and the unique external and inner properties of the latter. It should be noted, however, that the essence of the aesthetic “error,” the core of the *grotesque*, often lies in transferring the biological to the level of the culturally significant.

Minstrel props or accessories might have their roots with the Italian *commedia*, where players “wore demonic, bestial, leering masks; [and] ... leather phalluses that might be stuffed full for the Zani or hang limp for the Pantalone; later ones carried a sword and pouch in place of genitalia, and the Bawd carried a purse as a sign of her business or a rosary when she played a hypocrite” (Barasch 564). Clearly these *commedia* accessories show striking similarities with the paraphernalia applied in minstrelsy. Yet, whereas in the *commedia* these props served as mere triggers to stimulate laughter, in the minstrel theater comic accessories (just like the minstrel comedy in general) could not be divorced from their racial implications.

In minstrelsy “[t]he body was always grotesquely contorted, even when sitting; stiffness and extension of arms and legs announced themselves as unsuccessful sublimations of sexual desire.[...] Banjos were deployed in ways that anticipated the phallic suggestions of rock ‘n’ roll” (Lott 117). The explicitly vulgar imagery of sheet music covers and of minstrel lyrics served to strengthen, on the one hand, and to immediately undermine, on the other, the black man’s sexual power and appeal. Therefore most *grotesque minstrel props* should be seen within this secretly communicated, coded racial subtext.

The most frequently applied props were the common minstrel instruments (banjo, bones, violin), which, as noted, often carried sexual implications, just like the accessories of the Comic Black Soldier such as “coattails hanging prominently between characters’ legs [...], sticks or poles strategically placed near the groin or with other appendages occasionally hanging near or between the legs” (Lott 120). These *grotesque* props primarily belonged to the male stereotypes of the comic love theme, where sexual implications played a central role. The *grotesque* emerged partly as a result of the substitution of male sexual organs by objects (which by itself was a bizarre practice), plus the use

of these objects to generate comic, surprising and alienating effects, and all this through the exploitation of and fascination with the black male as the butt of jokes as well as the object of desire.

The bizarre, the highly exaggerated, the ambivalently attractive and repellent, yet always somehow perversely distorted was everywhere in the *grotesque props* appearing on sheet music covers, in minstrel lyrics and directly on the stage.

4. GROTESQUE MINSTREL SCENARIOS OF COMIC LOVE

The theme of love has always presented itself as a popular topic for the stage, whether writers dramatized its tragic or comic aspects. As expected, of all the themes that circulated widely on minstrel stages, it was undoubtedly the theme of love that proved most durable. In due course, like in established drama, the American popular minstrel stage also developed its own stereotypes and clichés for the love theme in its sentimental, melodramatic (the tragic mulatto formula) and comic modes. Therefore it is in the theme of comic love that we find the most fertile ground to examine variations on *grotesque minstrel scenarios*.

The very first burnt-cork song of comic love, “Coal Black Rose,”¹¹ is seen by many critics as also marking the beginning of the minstrel theater as such (Boskin 74). According to the Brown University notes for the song, George Washington Dixon was singing it as early as 1827, “while playing with a circus” (Wittke 18). Dixon was author of a number of early minstrel songs, and was widely known as one of the earliest blackface delineators. The Starr Collection version of the song cites Mr. W. Kelly as one of the many performers of the song, who got “unbounded applause” for his presentation, if we can believe the note on the sheet music cover.

¹¹ “Coal Black Rose” Brown University, Harris Collection, no. 13. In Starr. M1.S8, Afro-Americans before 1863. The Starr Collection edition was written by White Snyder; although Dennison cites a John Clemens as another possible author of the song.

The song popularized several *grotesque scenarios*: jealousy, love triangle, fights between suitors, etc., which later were widely imitated by songsmiths when the popularity of the theme among minstrel audiences became evident. Jealousy as a central comic love theme was certainly not a new topic in drama, but blackface minstrelsy added to the comedy by putting the unlucky comic black suitor in the role of the jealous lover. The song did not only fix the stereotype of the Jealous Black Lover, but also provided a standard script for songs of this kind. The outline of the plot was quite simple, and thus became easily familiar to blackface audiences, predictability and familiarity with the script even adding to the attraction and entertainment value of the act.

The recipe for the unmatched success of this song and of many inheriting its script was this. Take a charming, but somewhat mischievous black female, add the desperate and jealous black lover who comes courting right to her door. Let the woman tease her suitor for some time before allowing him inside. Have another black male hiding somewhere in the house, and once these three meet, the suitors go for each other's throat until one of them gets the better of the other. The comic love triangle portrayed in the song served, besides sheer situation comedy, to put blacks into the awkward position of the irresponsible lover, who did not regard honesty and faithfulness in marriage or in courtship as important or necessary. The song once again emphasized that blacks were "incapable of adopting white cultural values" (Dennison 38) regarding even the most basic social interactions. Although minstrel make-believe stages could engage audiences in good laughs at the expense of the cheated black lover, the reality of slavery was quite another thing. Marriage, or even a love relationship for the slave was a rather uncertain business, since the selling and trading of slaves, property rights and changing business interests of the owners made the lot of those slaves united in "marriage" completely unpredictable for the future. The Negro was considered a tradable property, and only very rarely a human being with feelings and true attachments to other humans. The simple fact was that slave marriages had no legal standing.

The minstrel show, however, had no interest in reality, or the actual reasons for historical conditioning, it wanted to entertain successfully, and to reach the goal the first thing it had to do was to turn its back on reality. The shows tried to justify the inhumanities of slavery (breaking up of families, selling married slaves to different owners, divorcing the child from the parents, etc.) by picturing the black as perfectly unfit for marriage. Slave marriages were pictured on the stage either as absolutely ridiculous, or disrupted by some *grotesque* disaster. In "The Yaller Gal With a Josey On,"¹² for instance, the songwriter expressed the black man's happiness over the elopement of his wife with a cattle driver. "Lucy Long,"¹³ a popular minstrel song, remembered by Edward LeRoy Rice¹⁴ as a tune "still is to be heard in remote hill-billy regions" (12), represented the black male as joyously expressing his willingness to get rid of his would-be wife:

*If I had a scolding wife,
As sure as she was born,
I'd tote her down to New Orleans,
And trade her off for corn.*
/Starr/

Another minstrel air, "Will No Yaller Gal Marry Me?" declared the young husband's preference for a life-time bondage in slavery over the hardships of his marriage ("Help! oh, help me, Mister Lawyer, cut the

¹² "The Yaller Gal With A Josey On" quoted in Dennison 120.

¹³ "Lucy Long" Brown University, Harris Collection, no. 31. In Starr. M1.S8, Afro-Americans before 1863. The song was also identified in some minstrel repertories as "Take Your Time Miss Lucy," and what critics regard as the original version of the song came to be published in 1842. The Brown University notes for the text claim that in one of the many variants of the song "Miss Lucy crosses the color line and becomes wholly white" (Brown Notes).

¹⁴ Rice, *Monarchs of Minstrelsy from "Daddy" Rice to Date* a collection of biographical sketches of the most famous minstrels.

rope and set me free,/ I will sell myself forever, if you will unmarry me!" (Dennison 120)). Slave marriages terminated by unusual events proved a similarly fruitful topic for songsmiths. "In "Rosa Lee," the mate "cotched a shocking cold"; "Sweet Rose of Caroline" was bitten by a rattlesnake and died; ..."Mary Blane"...[also] suffered a variety of misfortunes ..." (Dennison 110). "Dinah Crow"¹⁵ from 1849 described the *grotesque* ending of a nice love affair:

*One night I ax'd my Dinah, if she wid me would go
A sailing cross the ribber for to see my fader Joe;
When on de way so happy, so light and so gay,
My Dinah she fell over board and on de botom lay.
/Starr/*

In one version of the popular song, "Lucy Neal,"¹⁶ Miss Lucy, the lover of an Alabama 'nigga' "was taken sick" and died a ludicrous death soon afterwards, because of eating too much corn meal. Minstrel sweethearts, mistresses and wives died various *grotesque*, sometimes even "funny" deaths. The imagination of songsmiths knew no bounds if love's tragicomic conclusion was the matter at hand.

Unlike the suitors of Miss Lucy Neale, Dinah Crow or Mary Blane, other minstrel lovers or husbands did not usually mourn their dead partners too long. "The Ole Gray Goose"¹⁷ of 1844 pictured this lighthearted spirit of the minstrel black who could not be shaken by any disaster:

¹⁵ "Dinah Crow" Ethiopian Melody arranged for the Spanish guitar by Henry Chadwick; 1849.

¹⁶ "Lucy Neal" published by G. Willig in 1844; "Miss Lucy Neale or The Yellow Gal," a celebrated Ethiopian Melody.

¹⁷ "The Ole Gray Goose" Brown University, Harris Collection, no. 41. Available also in Starr. M1.S8, Afro-Americans before 1863. Cited as the "Gray Goose and Grandeur" in Dennison 124.

*Monday was my wedding day
Tuesday I was married,
Wen'sdy night my wife took sick
Sat'day she was buried.*

*Wen'sdy night my wife took sick
Despair ob death cum o'er her
O! some did cry, but I did laff
To see dat death go from her.
/Starr/*

Another version of the song quoted in Dennison registered the proceedings after the wife's death in a more explicit fashion, prefiguring some of the concluding events in Faulkner's poor white story of *As I Lay Dying*, where on the day of Addie's burial Anse Bundren goes off mysteriously by himself and then returns to his family with a new wife.

*Saturday night my old wife died,
Sunday she war buried,
Monday was my courting day,
On Tuesday I got married.
/Dennison 124/*

The pseudo-black male of minstrelsy did not take his relationships seriously, nor did he regard others' as sacred, or something to be respected. The stereotype of the Black Seducer and that of the Jealous Black Lover appeared together in most songs. The black male was pictured as at once careless and jealous in love. This discrepancy, however, did not seem to worry songsmiths who produced hundreds and hundreds of songs to fit both patterns. Most songs with the jealous lover theme fell back on the dramaturgy of "Coal Black Rose," which, as I have noted, set the convention for songs of this kind for several decades.

Although the script of the love-triangle theme did not show much diversity in songs, the reaction of the cheated lover to the treachery of his sweetheart varied from song to song. Some, like the cheated suitor of “Dearest Belinda”¹⁸ by S. A. Wells, showed weakness and the inability to take revenge on their rivals. The song in question showed the black suitor as uneducated in chivalrous matters, and a coward in the rivalry between black males for the hand of the woman (“Belinda made me feel so bad,/I wished my rival dead,/My feelings got de best of me,/And so I went to bed.”). This attitude prefigures E. Caldwell’s treatment of callousness in the face of love betrayal in poor white families. To illustrate that the black male did not take his love affairs too much to heart, the black suitor went on singing:

*In de morning when dis nigger wake,
I tink ob all dat past,
Belinda treat me very bad,
But I found her out at last,
I go and bid her den farewell!
I’ll see her not again;
I since have found another gal,
And loved her not in vain.
/Starr/*

In some songs the black male got satisfaction simply from threatening his rival, like in “Katy Dean,” (“I’ll call that darky out, I will, and kill him very dead” /Dennison 136/). Occasionally, calling the rival ludicrous names proved enough of a put down, as can be seen in the already quoted “Dearest Belinda” or in “Who’s Dat Nigga Dar A Peepin?”¹⁹ Besides humiliation and ridicule, naming practices in both cases helped to join the pseudo-black male figures with the stereotype of the ludicrously pretentious black dandy. The maleness of Count

¹⁸ “Dearest Belinda” quoted in Dennison 136—7.

¹⁹ “Who’s Dat Nigga Dar A Peepin?” published by C.H. Keith in 1844. Starr Collection.

Mustache, and Massa Zip Coon, the comic black lovers in hiding—as cited in the respective songs —, thus came under attack from two sides simultaneously.

In the majority of blackface songs the pseudo-black male was eventually engaged in physical encounter after the unfaithfulness of his mistress had been revealed. The harmless threatening and name-calling between rivals most of the time served merely as a lead-in exercise and open confrontation soon followed. In “Who’s Dat Nigga Dar A Peepin?” (1844) or in “Tell Me Josey Whar You Bin” (1841) there is no doubt left that the revelation of the love triangle would end with physical confrontation between the parties concerned. “Tell Me Josey Whar You Bin,”²⁰ a duet sung by John W. Smith and Thomas E. (“Pickaninny”) Coleman (Brown University Notes), pictured the infuriated lover as breaking the back of his rival in anger.

*He. Lubly Dinah then I'll tell you
It happened in an oyster cellar
A nigger hit me wid a stick
He. I laid him right out on the stone
She. Joe, you didn't break his bone
He. Yes, I heard something crack
She. Oh! Joe, you've broke the nigger's back.*
/Starr/

„Who’s Dat...,” on the other hand, quite unusually, showed the black female getting bested in the fight in a rather bizarre, burlesque-like fashion:

*Oh den us niggers you ort for to see
Dar was me hugging him and he was hugging me*

²⁰ “Tell Me Josey Whar You Bin” Brown University, Harris Collection, no. 29. In Starr Sheet Music Collection, Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana, M1.S8, Afro-Americans before 1863;

*Oh he bit me pon my arm and tore my close
I fotch him a lick and broke Miss Dinahs nose /etc./
/Starr/*

This kind of violence between the pseudo-black male and female characters was always presented in a light-hearted spirit in the shows, under the guise of “jealousy, braggadocio, bullying, and the like” (Dennison 134). Open degradation, ridicule and burlesque of the black male was quite unlikely on minstrel stages. Both social criticism and racial satire were delivered to audiences in a very subtle form. The primary suggestion of the blackface minstrel show was that it was pure comedy, and nothing else. An 1876 advertisement for the performance of the Georgia Minstrels in the *New York Clipper*, like many advertisements of the kind emphasized this purity of blackface presentations, it being completely free of racial burlesque:

THE BOSTON ADVERTISER SAYS: Callender’s band of the Georgia Minstrels presented an entertainment last evening that sparkled with fresh business, fresh jokes, and fresh music, and the charm of the whole was mainly to be found in the clever, realistic representation of broad Negro character, prompted by a good conception of the humorous side, without falling into the weakness of coarsely burlesquing it. The company is very strong*** They have no equals (*The New York Clipper* 18 March 1876: 408.)

Considering the extensiveness of minstrel materials on the comic theme of love, it is no exaggeration to state that this topic provided the most fruitful subject of all the various themes held up for comedy on the minstrel stages all around America, and certainly a bountiful site where the *minstrel grotesque* was flourishing in a variety of configurations. Situation comedy playing on bizarre and absurd confrontations and scenarios (grotesque deaths and fights), the downgrading of love through placing unworthy parties to act out elevated feelings, exaggeration of farcical situations and motifs, were

some of the techniques applied by songsmiths to create the *minstrel grotesque* in the thematic realm of the shows.

5. OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF THE MINSTREL GROTESQUE

As can be seen in these examples, *minstrel grotesque* penetrated various layers of the show, from stereotyped characters to minstrel props, themes and motifs. Yet, as should also be obvious from the previous accounts, the *grotesque*, although almost always present in every important feature of the shows, is hard to divorce from other branches of the comic, with which the *grotesque* tends to amalgamate in several of its occurrences. Hence it is worth reemphasizing the difficulty of giving exclusive dominance to a single comic quality in the analysis of different facets of the minstrel show, knowing what curious ambivalences of comic qualities (such as the *grotesque*, burlesque-like, satirical, farcical, ironical, humorous, etc.) are inherent in minstrelsy's characters, themes, styles and motifs.

In closing it is also important to note that beyond the rather obvious occurrences of *grotesque imagery* in the portrayal of characters, in minstrel accessories and themes, there were other areas or layers in minstrelsy where the *minstrel grotesque* was present, but which are not treated in detail in the present analysis. These possible fields of analysis are not incorporated here, partly because they would demand the application of new types of inquiry (the analysis of the *minstrel grotesque* in the minstrel dialect for instance would require a thorough linguistic line of analysis), partly because critical inquiries into the area have been exhaustive (like in the case of the minstrel mask), and partly because data are missing concerning certain areas (such as dance features, where the only proof as for the *grotesque* appearance of these dance numbers come from the scarce sheet music illustrations, and some recollections regarding early shows such as Thomas Dartmouth Rice's "Jim Crow" number).

Finally, here is a minstrel song, which to my mind epitomizes all the important aspects of the *literary minstrel grotesque*, through its

detailed *physical grotesque* of the Ugly Female, its *grotesque props* (which in this case is the female nose and throat inferring male and female genitalia, respectively), *grotesque theme* (the ridicule of the black female to make her impossible for male desire), diction (where nonsense lines, grammatical and stylistic lapses are serving to establish the alleged inferiority and ridiculousness of the character) and the *grotesque* of the invoked stage movement:

GAL FROM THE SOUTH

*Old massa own'd a coloured gall
He bought her at the south,
Her hair it curl'd so bery tight,
She couldn't shut her mouth,
Her eyes dey were so bery big,
Dey both run into one,
Sometimes a fly lights in her eye,
Like a june-bug on de sun.*

*Yah, ha, ha; yah, ha, ha,
De gal From the south,
Her hair it curl'd so bery tight,
She couldn't shut her mouth.*

*Her nose it was so bery long,
It made her laugh, by gosh,
For when she got her dander up,
It turned up like a squash,
Old massa had no hooks or nails,
Nor nothin like ob dat;
So on dis darkey's nose he used
To hang his coat and hat.*

*One morning massa gwain away,
 He went to get his coat,
 But nedder hat, nor coat, could find,
 For she had swallow'd both,
 He took her to the tailor's shop,
 To hab her mouth made small;
 De lady took in one long breath,
 A swallow's tailor and all.*

/Dennison 126/

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ZSOLT K. VIRÁGOS

THE AMERICAN BRAND OF THE MYTH OF
APOCALYPSE

*... the prophetic voice, that cried
To John in Patmos, "Write!"*

*Write! and tell out this bloody tale;
Record this dire eclipse,
This Day of Wrath, this Endless Wail,
This dread Apocalypse!*

—H. W. Longfellow, "To William E. Channing"

In a hypothetical list of the various satellites of the dominant clichés of American culture, the apocalyptic tradition would certainly occupy a prominent place. Indeed, it might not be an exaggeration to claim that the most viable myth bequeathed to the 20th century by previous American culture is the *myth of apocalypse*. Of course, we have to be staunch supporters of the idea of cultural continuity to make such a claim, for obviously the myth, or rather this Judeo-Christian mythic vision, was no American invention. Nonetheless, American culture has been the source and focus of a powerful apocalyptic vision. Beyond the fact that several major indigenous American religious

groups have been based on urgent apocalyptic expectations,¹ almost every aspect of American intellectual life has been permeated by traditional or secular apocalyptic visions. Indeed since the settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony by millenarian religious groups apocalypse has always been essential to America's conception of itself. Even as recently as the Gulf War of 1991, apocalyptic expectations preoccupied a sizeable percentage of the American population. So there *is* continuity.

Continuity, however, does not exclude radical transformations, and the historical fact is that, owing to the inevitable fragmentation, secularization and reinterpretations of the myth, by apocalyptic as it appears, say, in the contemporary novel and the popular culture of the last two or three decades, we mean something slightly or totally different from how the Biblical apocalyptists or the Puritan forefathers interpreted the concept.

Before going further, for the purposes of diminishing the potential confusion about myth, at least a tentative initial clarification of the conceptually elusive term seems inevitable. In the present paper, myth will be used in two broad senses and will be treated as two related but separable configurations: time-embalmed traditional myth as sacred narrative (Myth1, or M1) and myth as a politically expedient justifying-projective construct (Myth2, or M2), respectively. M1 thus stands for the archaic, the traditional, and the high-prestige phenomenon; M2 for the epistemologically suspect modern, the recent, and the contemporaneous. Although M1 and M2 can be as far apart as "ultimate truth" and "bad knowledge" can, there is a deep family resemblance between the two. Firstly, and ironically, in a strict epistemological sense both M1 and M2 are suspect configurations. While in M1 we can observe the attempt of the human mind to generate constructs for the purposes of explaining the totality of reality

¹ Based especially on urgent expectation of the second coming of Christ (the Seventh Day Adventists, the Latter Day Saints, the Jehovah Witnesses, and more recently the "Jesus people," in a variety of fundamentalist manifestations).

and justify its contradictions, and thus M1 may still be an obvious contender for supreme truth in the light of the transcendentalizing impulses or conative strategies of a true believer, the average myth consumer or the classic myth critic, few M1 formations in modern times could stand up to disinterested epistemological probing. Likewise, while a staunch believer may have absolutely no doubt about his or her cherished version of reality, someone with a different set of truth preferences may easily prove that the object of belief is merely a bunch of pleasant or disturbing lies: false propaganda, a set of fallacious assumptions, an erroneous ideology, "bad knowledge." Thus, while one frequently applied definition of a certain brand of persistently recurring borrowed or received material within the M1 category, "sacred tale or history," "traditional narrative," "high-prestige character type," etc. can be regarded as readily synonymous with "ultimate truth," it could as easily turn out to be false. Thus the M1 = ultimate truth and the M2 = bad knowledge formulas possess a mere statistical relevance; in a strict epistemological sense these equations could be either reversed or declared invalid. Indeed, M1 and M2, depending on the time frame in which they are examined, can be one and the same thing. As regards the general conceptual and functional links, both spheres are subsumed in the broad, if often contradictory and overly encyclopedic, concept of *myth* and in the all-inclusive function of *sense-making*. Likewise, they both pertain, in the final analysis, to the literary possibilities of myth, thus both representing legitimate subjects for myth-and-literature studies, with the reservation, of course, that time-honored myths as sacred texts or classical prefigurations (M1) have traditionally occupied a status considerably different from that accorded to ideologically attuned contemporary/contemporaneous social/cultural myths (M2) in terms of cultural prestige and actual or alleged significance. Yet another shared feature of the two distinct orders of myth is that they both serve as fundamentally revealing indicators of the complex relationship between myth, society, and literature. Thus they serve, either directly or indirectly, as sensitive barometers of the milieu of a given culture. As such, they are strongly

reflective and symptomatic of any particular nation's social circumstances, its collective self-image, value-impregnated beliefs, even of a given group's conception of its own destiny.

In view of the above it should come as no surprise that despite the established, historical approval and massive support that Biblical mythology has been accorded for almost two thousand years in Western civilization, dissenting voices regarding the question of the actual origins, meaning, and authority of canonical scriptural texts have not been absent. Within the American frame of reference, Thomas Paine's deistic "frontier Bible," *The Age of Reason* (1793—1795) was the first widely known attack on the divine origins of the major Christian document. Paine claimed, among other things, that the Biblical stories and characters are actually reworkings of Greek myths:

It is curious to observe how the theory of what is called the Christian church sprung out of the tail of the heathen mythology... The deification of heroes changed into the canonization of saints. The mythologists had gods for everything; the Christian mythologists had saints for everything... The Christian theory is little else than the idolatry of the ancient mythologists, accommodated to the purposes of power and revenue; and it yet remains to reason and philosophy to abolish the amphibious fraud. (271)

Thus, Paine observes, Christian Revelation never happened. Lloyd Graham's *Deceptions and Myths of the Bible* (1979) could be cited as a more recent study along similar lines. "There is nothing 'holy' about the Bible," Graham states bluntly and provocatively at the beginning of his book, "nor is it 'the word of God.'"

It was not written by God-inspired saints, but by power-seeking priests... By this intellectual tyranny they sought to gain control, and they achieved it. By 400 B.C. they were the masters of ancient Israel. For so great a project they needed a theme, a framework, and this they found in the Creation lore of more knowledgeable races. This they commandeered and

perverted—the natural to the supernatural, and truth to error. The Bible is, we assert, but priest-perverted cosmology. The process began with the very first chapter—the world’s creation. This first was not the original first; it is priestly cosmology substituted centuries later and for a priestly purpose... Literally, the priestly account of Creation is but kindergarten cosmology, yet we have accepted it for two thousand years... All the metaphysical and cosmological knowledge Western man has, came to him from the East... The Bible is not “the word of God,” but stolen from pagan sources. Its Eden, Adam and Eve were taken from the Babylonian account; its Flood or Deluge is but an epitome of some four hundred flood accounts; its Ark and Ararat have their equivalents in a score of Deluge myths; even the names of Noah’s sons are copies, so also Isaac’s sacrifice, Solomon’s judgment, and Samson’s pillar act; its Moses is fashioned after the Syrian Mises; its laws after Hammurabi’s code. Its Messiah is derived from the Egyptian Mahdi, Savior, certain verses are verbatim copies of Egyptian scriptures. Between Jesus and the Egyptian Horus, Gerald Massey found 137 similarities, and those between Christ and Krishna run into the hundreds. How then can the Bible be a revelation to the Jews?” (1—5)

Subsequently our author surveys the whole Bible book by book, often verse by verse, debunking most of its truth, symbology, coventionally accepted interpretations, as well as alleged sources and origins. At the beginning of the two separate chapters devoted to the discussion of the Revelation of St. John, Graham, not surprisingly, makes these two assertions: it is not a revelation, and it should not be taken too seriously. In the concluding part of the survey—verse by verse comments and corrections—he declares, “we see then that this ‘Revelation’ is no revelation at all, but ancient, esoteric Cosmology. As such, its ominous threats and glorious promises have no meaning for the individual either here or hereafter” (363, 407).

These are serious challenges, and once accepted, the authority of the quintessential authoritative text of the Middle Ages and Bible-in-literature studies in general would have to be radically revised, if not suspended. I am not prepared to join this potentially awesome debate and will leave it to the practitioners of the comparative and anthropological (and perhaps also political) study of religions and mythologies to decide the matter. In my subsequent discussion I will use the consensus view of Biblical mythology as my working assumption and will primarily focus on whether the myth of apocalypse should be understood as M1 or M2, and whether it can be seen as both. I believe that the myth of apocalypse is especially suited to such an inquiry.

Apocalypse means 'revelation' and despite the word's recent misuse, it is not a synonym for 'disaster,' 'upheaval,' 'chaos,' or 'doom.' 'Apocalyptic' is the form of *recorded* revelation in Judaism from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. Apocalyptic visions grew out of actual feelings of dissatisfaction, despair and a sense of political powerlessness of the Hebrew people as a result of the growth of the great empires of Persia, Greece, and Rome, and the persecution of the early Christians (Zamora, "Apocalypse" 88). These visions were also motivated by the recognized contradiction between earlier prophetic visions of Judaic history (which had predicted the establishment of a community based on a special relationship with Yahweh) and inspired by a belief that a channel of communication between the divine and the human is now open, direct revelation of the affairs of God is possible, through dream, vision or divine intermediary—usually a prophet.

It is essential to understand that at the time of its conception the myth of apocalypse was called upon to serve as M2 in satisfying a keenly felt group need of a persecuted minority: exhortation and encouragement to the suffering through the justification of tribulations at an unpromising present time through somehow projecting irresistible hope in a radically changed, better, timeless future. At the time of its genesis the myth was a timeserving device which was sufficiently transcendentalized by fixing its own truth to an

unquestioned Christian authority. And since the progression of events toward a given end, in the logic of the myth, is predetermined *but men's actions are not*, apocalypse provides a blueprint for action through a pattern of reward or vengeance: a glorious consummation of God's plan for those who have persisted in the faith and maintained their eschatological conviction, whereas the end of time will be catastrophic for the wicked, those who fail to act for the achievement of the kingdom of God. Thus people are given a choice and a program for action: apocalypse urges loyalty, tenacity, struggle, will, even martyrdom for the cause of God's kingdom. The pragmatic drift (which here takes the form of both the *therapeutic* and the *didactic* — almost to the point of the *disciplinary*; not to forget about the *politically expedient*)—as well as the conative drive (wish fulfilment + volition) inherent in this mythmaking transaction is more than obvious. And so is the operation of two major functional elements (*justification + projection*), with all of these identified as staple components of a ubiquitous and predictable mythmaking process. The mythic formula was both present-oriented and future-tending in that it offered justification for present suffering (by offering promise at an unpromising present time) through delayed gratification.

Thus in the myth of apocalypse a curious overlap between M1 and M2 can be detected. Indeed, as I said earlier, the two can be one and the same thing. All depends on the point of time we choose to consider and analyse them. If we look at the time-honored Biblical texts today, we are dealing with M1; if we consider their functional, epistemological, and functional aspects at the time of their genesis, we have M2. We are also witnessing here two crucial modes of how the human mind is capable of shielding itself from the unknown and from the intrusion of the apparently irrational: through claiming, on the one hand, that the future, which is usually unknown, is known and, on the other hand, by forcing the volatile —i.e., man's private wishes, deeds, and decisions — into the more easily manageable formula of reward and punishment. The fact remains that at the time of their inception what came to be known as testamental apocalyptic texts and visions clearly satisfied the

immediate needs and ideology of a persecuted people in order to maintain faith during a period of harsh political, social, and religious sanctions. Although the myth incorporates notions which appear to be fuzzy and confused, the soothing formula as a self-authenticating and projective construct offering delayed gratification proved and has proved vital and enduring throughout more than two millenia of history to various groups and communities during periods of oppression, affliction, and persecution. The myth and its many reinterpreted mutations have withstood the erosions of time, and were capable of influencing a wide spectrum of authors, cultures, and schools of thought as diverse as Milton, the socio-political views of the English Romantic poets, the Marxist ideology of a happy future, or fascist totalitarianism complete with a Third Reich ideology (via Joachim of Fiore) and a Final Solution (Zamora, "Apocalypse" 91, Kermode 101, Dowling 118). To cite obvious American examples, the destining ideology of New England Puritanism may serve as a case in point. Or consider the ease with which the African American community appropriated the myth of apocalypse to be used as a psychological safety valve during and since slavery times.

Testamental apocalypse emphasizes future events and exhorts men to endure their *present* suffering with the assurance of a blessed *future* life. Since the given historical situation of the Hebrew people made the special community with Yahweh less and less realizable, only a radical change or break in history would be enough to rectify present conditions. The present age of suffering and persecution will have to end abruptly and through transcendental miracle: a prospective providential rescue. Hence the mythic innovation of the apocalyptists to see the future as *breaking into the present*, through a *dramatic intrusion of the divine* (the direct intervention of God), instead of gradually arising from it. Thus, although this radical reinterpretation of time, history, and the future developed from the Judaic prophetic tradition, it is useful to regard the apocalyptist's conception of the

unique linkage between present and future as being also different from (or a distinct manifestation of) the prophets' vision of history.²

Biblical apocalyptic, then, is basically a type of preview of the end of an age and of the establishment of a new one. It most often predicts the ultimate destiny of the world by suggesting a terrible final end. Apocalyptic imagery connotes the "end of the world" or "Judgment Day" as specific events with which history is to terminate³ because the world itself will disappear into its two unending constituents, a heaven and a hell, into one of which man automatically goes. Since the Renaissance, however, the concept of this cosmic and radical turning-point has been largely shorn of its biblical overtones and the subsequent use of the word has tended to refer to secular and humanistic phenomena, whether social, political or psychic transformation.

Within the American frame of reference, earlier national optimism proceeded from a millennial vision, in which the idea of the end of the world is complemented by that of its possible renewal. The reason for the intrinsic optimism of the millennial vision is evident in the original Jewish sources. Apocalypse, as described, for instance, in the fourteenth chapter of the book of Zechariah, is more reconstruction than destruction, more of a beginning of a new than an ending of the old, more of a vision of hope than of dissolution. Thus the original understanding of apocalypse can be defined simply as a revelation of spiritual realities in the future.

This is clearly reflected in the early American manifestations. In New England Puritan literature Increase Mather's "New Jerusalem" (1687) suggests that New England was to be the site of the fulfilment of

² Canonical and noncanonical apocalyptic texts exist in abundance in both Hebrew and Christian writings. The foremost examples of testamentary Hebrew apocalypses are Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, whereas the Gospel of St. Mark and the second Epistle of St. Peter contain apocalyptic passages and, above all, the revelation of St. John of Patmos exemplifies Christian testamentary apocalypse.

³ Cf. the fourteenth chapter of the book of Zechariah, the Revelation of St. John, or the medieval Latin hymn *Dies Irae*.

God's promise to his chosen people, and in 1727 Samuel Sewall proposed, in his *Phaenomena quaedam apocalyptica...*, America as the site of the triumphant culmination of world history. To illustrate the nature and flavor of traditional apocalyptic discourse, I am going to quote a short passage, which will perhaps demonstrate some of the basic components and the Bible-inspired verbal ritualization of the traditional millennial conception. The author is David Austin (1760—1831), one of the most important successors in the New England millennial convention to Jonathan Edwards (1703—1758), whose disciple he actually was. The time is the end of the 18th century, the period of Revolutionary trial then underway. The title of the book is *The Downfall of Mystical Babylon; or Key to the Providence of God, in the Political Operations of 1793—94*.⁴

Behold, then, this hero of America, wielding the standard of civil and religious liberty over these United States!—Follow him, in his strides, across the Atlantic!— See him, with his spear already in the heart of the beast!—See tyranny, civil and ecclesiastical, bleeding at every pore! See the votaries of the tyrants; of the beasts; of the false prophets, and serpents of the earth, ranged in battle array, to withstand the progress and dominion of him, who has commission to break down the usurpation of tyranny—to let the prisoner out of the prison-house; and to set the vassal in bondage free from his chains—to level the mountains—to raise the valleys, and to prepare an highway for the Lord! (34)

For the sake of observing the meeting-points of the symbolic imagery of apocalyptic discourse used for quite different purposes, it may be instructive to compare Austin's text, applied with a few historical variations to the 18th-century American scene, with a much more recent, and secularized, passage from a 1970s source on the radical temper:

⁴ Elizabethtown, 1794.

Thunder and lightning ... overturning days ... teetering and tumbling affairs ... blood will have blood ... doomes-day drawing nigh ... the rule of the just ... a true reformation ... a flood tide of change ... audacious men and dark prophecies ... words are actions ... the minds of men ... purge the nation ... overthrow the rotten structures ... the holy destruction of the evil of oppression and injustice ... the golden age is at hand ... the fire and the sword. (Laski 285—86)

Another comparison, this time with scenes of chaotic destruction and unredeemed suffering as depicted in a number of 20th-century war novels, like the one Heller's Yossarian experiences in the dark ruined city of Rome, or the careless annihilation of the planet, the freezing of the earth in Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, or the scene depicting the burnt-out landscape of Dresden after the fire-storm in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the final scene of Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*, or the frenetic search of Mrs. Oedipa Mass in *The Crying of Lot 49* for the revelation of the meaning of life (perhaps the Pentecostal word) in a nightmarish postmodern terrain of high technology and obscure conspiracies may easily convince us that we are dealing with different interpretations of the traditional pattern.

On the basis of Austin's text four typical traits of the American apocalyptic can be immediately established: the concept of a messianic mission for a chosen group of people as a part of the redemptive scheme of history; a sense of optimism occasioned by the revealed prospect of a bright future for those chosen by God; a sense of the apocalyptic "joy" aboard the American ship of state (Bercovitch 105); and again, in mixing history and prophecy, a reading of contemporary events as the fulfillment of the historical plan revealed in the last book of the New Testament. All these traits seem to be eminently present and operative in earlier American conceptualization and expressiveness, and they soon became enduring cultural clichés of the American social consciousness.

Yet another feature of apocalyptic millennialism, not readily discernible from either of the quoted texts, is an acceptance of

tribulations as a necessary prelude to the victory promised by God to his chosen. Thus in classic apocalyptic logic destruction is clearly seen as a prelude to reconstruction: earthly sufferings are seen as a small price to pay for eternal happiness. This last characteristic was still very much operative in the last century in that Protestant adherents of millennialism were ready to interpret even the Civil War as a bloody but ennobling purgation, an inevitable “scourging” dictated by the apocalyptic timetable. Viewed by a nation of Bible-readers as a moral conflict, the Armageddon of the Civil War, “a biblical crusade in blue and grey” (Dewey 16), seemed to fit exactly into a pattern long established. Indeed it seemed to confirm the validity of that pattern: seeing the evil of the times as a necessary prerequisite of the birth throes of the new order. In the Civil War years the apocalyptic trumpet sounded its clearest note in “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” by Julia Ward Howe (1819—1910), first published in February, 1862. Deploying imagery that shows a close correlation with the symbols and general spirit of Revelation, the “Battle Hymn’s” ultimate message is future-oriented, millennial, therefore intrinsically optimistic.

Like all complex and popular myths, traditional apocalypse has been subject to the inevitable process of fragmentation into a loosely interrelated cluster of constituent elements: a satellite of images, symbolic patterns, iconic clichés, visions of violence, thematic segments, hermetic symbols, numerological references, etc. Since both religious and secular, and often even looser, uses have added new analogous components in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Romantic era, and in the 20th century, often it is not easy to find a synchronic family resemblance among these often mutually exclusive, apocalyptic components such as “the end of things,” “earthly beatitude,” “loss of energy,” “social renovation,” “end of history,” “earthly paradise,” “end of the present age,” “the Third Reich,” “one world government,” “heat death,” “the seven seals,” “world revolution,” “concern with final things,” “the ideal king,” “Judgment Day,” “great ruler myth,” “the four horsemen,” “last emperor myth,” “an optimistic

modern apocalyptic,”⁵ “secular schematas of progressive history,”⁶ “the angelic pope,” “individual perfection” (as an apocalyptic event), etc.

The apparent heterogeneity of the above cluster may result in either weakening the frame of referentiality in literary, and any other, discourse or, from the other end, it may prompt excessive analogous interpretations where any decay, accident, decline, or end (e.g. the end of a love affair) is apocalyptic, with the concomitant hope that a great deal has been added by placing the quotidian in an ostensibly larger frame of reference. As regards the interpretation of apocalyptic archetypes, allusions or symbolic patterns as they occur in the testamental texts, the fact that apocalyptic visions go well beyond simple description, that they are couched in language that is often cryptic and obscure, they have offered rich philosophical and poetic content for subsequent interpretations and prefigurative uses. Yet the ramifications of D. Dowling’s observation might be worth considering:

Clearly, when writers and readers adopt a system of imagery from another time and place, they may be doing so for a variety of motives, not all admirable. There is also room for much confusion when the imagery of apocalyptic is adopted into a secular context and the already confused notions of an interim period of strife (the thousand year reign of the Devil), Judgment Day and the new Jerusalem, struggle to find some secular counterpart. (119)

Moreover, I find that today’s apocalypses may appeal in their own right, without mythological shoring up, for the simple reason that the necessity to confront the “last things” possesses irresistible existential overtones that concern fundamental questions of the human predicament. Nevertheless, the connotative cultural residue of these questions is both enormous and awesome and there is no dismissing the heritage of Biblical mythology in any consideration of the literary

⁵ Of which, according to Martin Buber, the chief example is Marx’s theory of history.

⁶ from Vico and Comte via Prudhon to Hegel and Marx

uses of the various apocalyptic schemata. However, in the post-nuclear resurgence of “last things” images, which are obvious analogues of religious configurations, actual literary uses show that these images tend to be disconnected from religious doctrine or, on the more popular level, their authority is likely to come from the mythology of science fiction. We are obviously dealing here with the literary exploitation of a common pool of inflated symbology where the rhetoric of the religious believer and the secular millenarian may easily converge.

The 20th-century shift in emphasis brought about several important changes: the modern sense of apocalypse has been secularized to a large extent, and millennial vision has been supplanted by the *annihilist* or *cataclysmic*. What follows from these is the salient fact that by modern times the apocalyptic view conceives of cataclysm as a violent upheaval which brings no profound changes beyond being an ultimate threat to survival, thus the element of traditional optimism is curiously missing. In an age of fluid valorizations there is no such thing as the final triumph of the righteous, there is no glorious consummation. Confident expectation tends to be suppressed by mere visions of violence with no anticipation of order beyond chaos accelerated by entropic forces. In other words, the current emphasis on the annihilist dimension of apocalypse does not synthesize the apocalyptic *vision* of the end with the apocalyptic *interpretation* of the end. As L. P. Zamora has observed,

[D]uring much of this century ... America's sense of its apocalyptic historical destiny has become almost universally pessimistic in outlook. In our time millennial optimism seems to have been transformed into a foreboding suspicion of the imminence of great cosmic disaster in which the world may be annihilated, with no possibility of anything beyond cataclysm.

(1)

A large segment of contemporary culture, where the current emphasis on the cataclysmic dimension of apocalypse, the so-called

doomsday mentality, is especially conspicuous, is popular culture. As A. M. Greeley has recently observed, "the SF imagination no longer constructs scientific utopias but either partial or total apocalypses in which the bad we know is wiped out and replaced by something every bit as bad" (Greeley 282). Recent end-oriented science fiction frequently envisions the disappearance of the human race; numerous television programs and disaster movies suggest a veritable "boom in doom"; there has been a recent rash in the mass media of subjects like the ends of cities, empires, other worlds and galaxies; similarly characteristic thematic stereotypes are, for instance, the depredations of an unbridled technology, computers turning into doomsday machines, nuclear mistakes, manmade or extraterrestrially induced holocausts, the blind working of astronomical fate, comet collision, exploding stars, species extermination, total pogroms, mankind terrorized by animals—apes, rats, wasps, ants—enlarged to monsters by atomic radiation, the spectacular destruction of some colossal human creation, etc. "Reading widely in the cataclysmic tradition is a rather numbing experience," J. Dewey testifies, "like watching a succession of brakeless automobiles slowly heading up a long incline" (Dewey 13).

The relevance of the current preoccupation with the annihilistic vision in popular culture is clearly shown by the revealing titles of some novels published since 1970: *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), *The Lost Continent* (1970), *The Day After Judgment* (1971), *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (1972), *The Terminal Generation* (1976), *Nuclear Nightmares* (1979), etc. I might add that the first of these novels—read also by Ronald Reagan⁷—has sold over 10 million copies since 1970 and the other books have been reprinted more than ten times. The large number of popular fictions of nuclear disaster, an increasing number of recent disaster films, some of them familiar to

⁷ The political thinking of the fortieth president of the U.S. seems to have been imbued with apocalyptic religious ideas and he made repeated statements about the imminence of an Armageddon. Consider also the Reagan administration's "end-times" mentality. Cf. Jones 59—70.

Hungarian movie-going audiences, like *The Towering Inferno* (1974), *Earthquake* (1975) or several *Airport* films, follow similar apocalyptic scenarios of endtimes.

Recently such manifestations of the stereotyping routinization of formulaic art have received more and more attention from students of American culture, and for the right reasons. The assumption is probably correct that popular culture is a sensitive barometer of the existing beliefs and myth-structure; the relation between the effects of "mere entertainment" of this sort and socio-political behavior might be less tenuous than had been previously thought.

There is one more crucial aspect of apocalyptic myth I will briefly consider here: *time*. To the traditional apocalypticist, time itself becomes a vehicle of divine purpose. After the final cosmic struggle between Satan's forces and God's, time will cease, heaven and earth will become one for eternity, and the faithful will enter the City of God. Thus the apocalyptic conception of time, which is the direct consequence of accepting divine providence as a theory of historical causation, is predicated upon an *anti-historical structuring of history*. Between two fixed points, from Creation to Apocalypse, time moves toward a predetermined and transcendent end in a way that is irreversible and linear, deterministic and teleological. In classic apocalyptic texts a sequence of events is described, each event belonging to a definite pattern of historical relationships that will not repeat itself in the cyclical manner of Oriental myth. Rooted in the Hebraic tradition of constructing history as a continuum from past through present to future, the apocalyptic conception of this linear process makes the present always futuretending. This, by the way, is a common feature of all the traditional destining myths. As W. A. Clebsch has aptly remarked, "Our totems have told us about a past presence of divine reality, whose irruptions have pointed to a future time and to an unoccupied space. Instead of our having a tradition *push* identity upon us, our destiny has *pulled us* into it" (87). The corollary of this conception is that historical movement between two fixed points is understood to be evolutionary rather than cyclical; in the linear

progression of time each event moves toward its goal which lies at the end of history. Thus the Hebraic interpretation of time also suggests that *the end of the world can only occur once*.

According to the logic of apocalyptic thinking, however, history without God would be meaningless because there would be no script. "The optimism of the apocalyptic tradition cannot be separated from the vision of God as controlling history" (Bergoffen 29). Thus the critical difference between the historical orientations of the traditional and current apocalyptic visions is that the contemporary visions are basically *nonteleological*. This new emphasis on the lack of any progressive design appears consistent with the pessimistic annihilations that R. Sukenick suggested in "The Death of the Novel," maintaining that "...time doesn't exist ... God was the omniscient author, but he died; ... Time is reduced to presence, the content of a series of discontinuous moments. Time is no longer purposive, and so there is no destiny, only chance." Thus it should come as no surprise that the very act of writing in accordance with the logic of Sukenick's extreme stance could be reduced to one of the "ways of maintaining a considered boredom in the face of the abyss" (41).

The idea of Apocalypse without God creates a totally different set of priorities because the Biblical vision of things to come is a metaphoric itinerary for God's inevitable victory over evil and the removal of God from his own scheme virtually collapses the myth. The nature of the dilemma is thus clear: if there is no script, and if time is not purposive, man is left only with the visions of violence (as detailed, for instance, in the Revelation of St. John) and an inscrutable, impersonal retributive power. Moreover, if the future breaks into the present unaccountably, if history itself is degenerative and malign, if human freedom *within* history is denied, if there is no rationale for viewing calamities as merely crises with a potential for correction and renewal (which actually means the disruption of the creative dualism of the inherited Biblical model: the undoing of the dialectic tension between chaos *and* order, tribulation *and* triumph, ultimately between cataclysm *and* millennium), man is incapable of understanding the

spiritual purpose of history. Neither is he able to communicate it; history becomes simply time the destroyer.

Of course, the Revelation should be read and understood as an allegory, and the early church itself condemned belief in a literal millennium as a superstitious aberration. The cryptic and obscure language of the traditional texts has encouraged fertile interpretations ever since the early Middle Ages, with Joachim of Fiore as the first important apocalyptic visionary, influencing, among other things (movements and ideologies) recent American authors like Walker Percy. That our own age has focused primarily upon the cataclysmic aspect of the myth and that God, the writer of the script, has himself become one of the "Dead Fathers" is symptomatic.

Under these circumstances, what is the contemporary writer to do? The options are limited: dull-eyed apathy, black humor, resorting to strategies of slowing down or arresting destiny's pull, creating for the modern anti-hero a kind of quasi-freedom *from* history through noninvolvement, turning inward, or just "waiting it out" as, for instance, Ellison's nameless hero does in *Invisible Man*.

In pre-twentieth-century American literature there were only occasional glances toward the negative, annihilist side of the apocalyptic myth. Much of New England Puritan literature displayed the threat of the Day of Judgment and the Calvinistic doctrine of damnation and reprieve. Puritan "Doomsday verses," with vivid images of hell fire and descriptions of impending cosmic disasters and of the future new world, such as Michael Wigglesworth's popular "The Day of Doom" (1662), were expected to serve contending aims: "to instruct, to delight and to terrify" (Ruland 21), but primarily to reconcile the frightening (Wigglesworth: "*till God began to power/ Destruction the world upon/ in a tempestuous shower... And every one that hath misdone,/ the Judge impartially/ Condemneth to eternal woe,/ and endless misery*") and the comforting ("*For God above in arms of love/ doth dearly them embrace,/ And fills their sprites with such delights,/ and pleasures in His grace*";) aspects inherent in the pragmatic needs of Puritan utility and the reassuring message that a final order prevailed

in all things. Thus, in spite of the “sulphurousness” and the equally terrifying cold logic of God’s justified wrath in much of New England Puritan writing, the characteristic vision was millennial in the sense that the Biblical myth comprehends both cataclysm *and* millennium: the regenerate would ultimately reign with Christ eternally:

*For there the saints are perfect saints,
and holy ones indeed,
From all the sin that dwelt within
their mortal bodies freed:
Made kings and priests to God through Christ’s
dear love’s transcendency,
There to remain, and there to reign
with Him eternally.*

Evangelically motivated abolitionist writing before and during the Civil War deployed frightening apocalyptic symbology to serve as warning. Otherwise, in the age of both the first person singular and empire building, when optimistic visions of an ecstatic future represented the dominant tenor of the times, Poe, whom Douglas Robinson considers as the “central American apocalypticist” (281), was certainly an exception. Predictably, and for various well-known reasons, the budding culture’s first *homo aestheticus* was reluctant to embrace millennial optimism and the celebration of a brave new world. His preoccupation with cosmological catastrophes and the cataclysmic end of the world peaked in the prose poem “Eureka,” where interest in the annihilation of the world as a scientific reality is conspicuous.⁸

Two of the prominent 19th-century nay-sayers, Hawthorne and Melville, both questioned the likelihood of a glorious consummation. Still, although Hawthorne’s Puritan sense of the moral burden of

⁸ Poe’s preoccupation with the cataclysmic option is also apparent in “Al Aaraaf,” “The Masque of the Red Death,” the metaphysical prose dialogues “The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion,” “The Colloquy of Monos and Una,” and “The Power of Words.”

history is a haunting presence, his equally ever-present ambivalence did let a few rays of sunshine appear, as, for example, in Hester's urgent appeal to Dimmesdale („Begin all anew!...The Future is yet full of trial and success. There is happiness to be enjoyed!" /Hawthorne 215/). Conversely, the mood of a strangely foredoomed demise hangs over and leads to the destruction of the *Pequod*, whose captain, named after the seventh king of Israel, finds his Armageddon in the supreme limitations of the self. Whether or not Ishmael's emergence from the vortex is an indication of rebirth is rather ambiguous. The tragic consequences of the inscrutable Bartleby's dark secret and entropic world, or of Don Benito's newly gained knowledge of the abyss are hardly outweighed by the ambivalent optimism, in any, of *Billy Budd*. Melville (and the Mark Twain of *A Connecticut Yankee*), through his emphatic stress on the dark side of the myth anticipates much of the literature of our century, where the first major representative of the apocalyptic vision in fiction is Faulkner.

Although the processes of Faulkner's universe are mostly secular, the pervasive sense of fateful doom does possess the flavor of transcendental script and predetermined destiny.⁹ His obsessive exploration of the reasons and consequences of the doom and destiny of the South, the fictional logic of his total output pointing to the ultimate message that the doom, disintegration and decline of the prototype of his literary kingdom were not only inevitable but also foreordained, his epic emphasis on the fatal pressure of the past sins upon the sons, and other related elements make Faulkner's novels appear among the most apocalyptic in modern literature. Because of the terrible moral heritage of slavery, human presumptuousness, pride and pervasive corruption, dynasties are crushed by the relentless passage of time and the impersonal forces of history. Down go the Sutpens, the Griersons, the Compsons, the Sartoris clan, one by one. In

⁹ It is primarily due to the apparent lack of apocalypse *as a religious structure* that critics like Zbigniew Lewicki are reluctant to treat Faulkner's works as apocalyptic fiction.

the story of Sutpen, who appears in the county in the shape of “man-horse-demon,” the whole pattern, like in the Revelation, of creation, growth, decay, and final catastrophe is projected onto history. Devices of narration, clearly borrowed from testamental sources, like Miss Rosa telling the Sutpen story from beyond the end of history, or the fatal course of blind personal destinies are just a few instances of Faulkner’s apocalyptic sensibility. Quentin Compson, “bitter prophet and inflexible corruptless judge,” stops destiny’s pull by arresting it forever at a point through suicide, thus gaining freedom *from* history that is dictated by a program to which he has no access. Faulkner’s doomed characters move in the closed world of a predestined temporal course where the dimension of the future has been cut off, which is analogous with the way how the traditional apocalypticist recounted the future: as if it were past. Apart from tentative hints that the South might one day emerge as the redeemer of the country, whatever gleam of American millennialism that might remain is largely extinguished. This is a feature also shared by writers like Nathanael West (*The Day of the Locust*, 1939) and, with different emphases, by the explicitly apocalyptic prose of writers as diverse as Steinbeck, Richard Wright or Ellison. The title of one of Baldwin’s essay collections, *The Fire Next Time* (1963), could serve as an ironic motto of the heavy apocalyptic batteries of Pynchon, Vonnegut or Heller.

It would be difficult to provide a reliable diagnosis of the current mood in the increasingly multicultural American society. It might not be a safe bet to claim that the country is in an apocalyptic mood. On the evidence of the prose literature of the past three decades there seems to be an agreement that the American secular mood is gloomy and that the recent prevalence of the cataclysmic construction of apocalypse is not an accidental phenomenon. At the same time, however, we must be aware of the fact that in particular works of recent fiction the very image of apocalypse has been put to uses other than just a projection of frightening dead-ends or apathetic nihilism. Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* or Heller’s *Catch-22* could serve as good cases in point. One of the imaginative fictions of history and the apocalyptic myth, the

former author also recognizes the problems of fiction's potential for humanism. When wedded to the affirmative interests of humanism, apocalyptic fiction can serve as effective alerting-cautionary medium as it lays the secular menace of nuclear destruction, the impersonal entropic chaos, or ecological disaster before us. Just as St. John of Patmos catalogues the disasters of the present age to suggest the inevitability of divine intervention in history, or like the prologue of *Piers Plowman*, which presents an apocalyptic setting of social decay that requires rebirth, the apparent pessimism about America's destiny in recent fiction may be indicative, in accordance with the logic of traditional apocalyptic heritage, of a veiled exhortation to possible renewal. Or, as R. W. B. Lewis summed it up three decades ago: "These apocalyptic visions indeed are offered as weapons for averting the catastrophe" (235).

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LEHEL VADON

SINCLAIR LEWIS: A HUNGARIAN BIBLIOGRAPHY

The intention of the editor of the Eger Journal of American Studies is to launch for a bibliographical series of major American authors in Hungary.

The present bibliography is satisfying to make available for the first time a reasonably complete record of publications—both primary and secondary sources—of Sinclair Lewis.

The books in Primary Sources are listed in order of date of first publication in English, followed by the Hungarian translation in chronological arrangement. Selections from the novels of Sinclair Lewis and his short stories in Hungarian translations are arranged in order of publication date in Hungary.

The entries of the Secondary Sources are presented under the names of the authors, listed in alphabetical order. The entries by unknown authors are arranged in chronological order.

Material for this bibliography has been collected from periodicals and newspapers, listed in the book: Vadon Lehel: *Az amerikai irodalom és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiája a magyar időszaki kiadványokban 1990-ig*.

A key to the Hungarian abbreviations and word: évf. = volume, sz. = number, kötet = volume.

This bibliography is a mark of the compiler's respect of the 110th anniversary of Sinclair Lewis' birth.

1. SINCLAIR LEWIS IN HUNGARIAN

(Primary Sources)

- a. Sinclair Lewis' Books in Hungarian Translation and Editions
- b. Selections from the Novels of Sinclair Lewis
- c. Sinclair Lewis' Short Stories in Hungarian Translation

2. HUNGARIAN PUBLICATIONS ABOUT SINCLAIR LEWIS

(Secondary Sources)

- a. Books about Sinclair Lewis
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- d. Reviews of Sinclair Lewis' Plays
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133. Sinclair Lewis: A Fő-utca. *Népszava*, "Figyelő" irodalmi melléklet, 1930. LVIII. évf. 68. sz. 7.
134. Sinclair Lewis: Benzinállomás. [=Free Air.] *Literatura*, 1933. VIII. évf. 191.
135. Sinclair Lewis: Szegény lány pénzt keres. [=The Job: An American Novel.] *Literatura*, 1933. VIII. évf. 396.
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137. Sinclair Lewis: Ez nálunk lehetetlen. [=It Can't Happen Here.] *A Könyv*, 1936. III. évf. 2. sz. 6.
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143. Új regényünk. (Sinclair Lewis: Hétmillió dollár.) [=Our New Novel. Sinclair Lewis: Seven Million Dollars.] *Új Idők*, 1937. XLIII. évf. 20. sz. 735.
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146. Sinclair Lewis: A tékozló szülők. [=The Prodigal Parents.] *A Könyv*, 1938. IV. évf. 2. sz. 8.
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153. Sinclair Lewis: A Fő-utca. [=Main Street.] *Magyar Kultúrszemle*, 1943. VI. évf. 10. sz. 235.

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156. Sinclair Lewis: Elmer Gantry, a prédikátor. [=Elmer Gantry, the Preacher.] *Csillag*, 1947. I. évf. 1. sz. 56.
157. Sinclair Lewis: Gideon Planish. *Magyar Nemzet*, 1960. XVI. évf. 303. sz. 4.
158. Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith. 3rd ed. Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 624 pp. *Érdekes Könyvújdonságok*, 1969. 1. sz. [4.]
159. Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith. *Könyvbarát*, 1969. 1. sz. 4.
160. Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith. *Nők Könyvespolca*, 1969. 2. sz. 12.
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2/d

Reviews of Sinclair Lewis' Plays

162. BALASSA IMRE: Színházi szemle. (Sinclair Lewis: Dodsworth.) [=Theatrical Review.] *Magyar Kultúra*, 1934. XXI. évf. 19. sz. 293.
163. B. L. (BERÉNYI LÁSZLÓ): Sinclair Lewis: Dodsworth. Színmű három felvonásban. A regényt dramatizálta Sidney Howard. (Színkritika a Vígszínház előadásáról.) [=A Play in three acts.

The novel was dramatized by Sidney Howard. The review is on the performance of the Víg Theater.] *Élet*, 1934. XXV. évf. 40. sz. 752.

164. GERGELY GYŐZŐ: Dodsworth. A Vígszínház bemutatója. [=Première in the Víg Theater.] *Népszava*, 1934. LXII. évf. 214. sz. 8.
165. RÉDEY TIVADAR: Dodsworth. Sinclair Lewis és Sidney Howard színműve a Vígszínházban. [=The play of Sinclair Lewis and Sidney Howard in the Víg Theater.] *Napkelet*, 1934. XI. évf. 10. sz. 613- 615.
166. SCHÖPFLIN ALADÁR: Színházi bemutatók. (Sinclair Lewis: Dodsworth.) [=Theatrical Premières.] *Nyugat*, 1934. XXVII. évf. II. kötet, 19. sz. 340- 341.

2/e

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167. MÁTHÉ LAJOS: Filmszemle. (Sinclair Lewis: Dodsworth.) [=Review of Motion Picture.] *Magyar Kultúra*, 1937. XXIV. évf. 10. sz. 316- 317.
168. Arrowsmith. *Népszava*, 1934. LXII. évf. 95. sz. 11.

2/f

Cross-word Puzzles

169. Sinclair Lewis. *Utunk*, 1966. XXI. évf. 3. sz. 4.
170. Sinclair Lewis. *Új Tükör*, 1984. XXI. évf. 3. sz. 38.

JOHN C. CHALBERG

LEHEL VADON: *UPTON SINCLAIR IN HUNGARY*

Eger, Hungary: College Press, 1993. 125 pp.

Can it be said that writers are immortal? Upton Sinclair thought so. But has the muckraking novelist and crusading socialist actually attained such status himself? Lehel Vadon has helped to answer that question affirmatively—at least according to one of Sinclair's standards. It was long the contention of the author of *The Jungle* and countless other books that one of the surest signs of an author's immortality was his popularity outside his native land. And Professor Vadon has amply demonstrated that Sinclair has long had a more than ample audience in a country far removed from the grimy Baltimore and gritty New York of his youth and young manhood—and even farther removed from his adopted and much beloved southern California.

Just as *The Jungle* established a twenty-eight year old Upton Sinclair as a major writer in the United States, so the introduction of the novel to European audiences was the initial reason that Sinclair had a significant following in pre-World War I Hungary. More specifically, Sinclair's fictional expose of exploitation in the American meatpacking industry both made him a hero of sorts among Hungarian social democrats and led the Hungarian government to "tighten up on" its own meat industry.

But at the same time Sinclair was not highly regarded in Hungarian literary and intellectual circles. In Vadon's words, the "writer's painstakingly accurate documentary style" virtually assured

that Hungarian literary journals would have “little appreciation” for Upton Sinclair.

Such journals in both Hungary and the United States were correct to dismiss much of Sinclair’s early work as second-rate at best and utter trash at worst. But *The Jungle* was another matter entirely. Here was a gripping story that also happened to be a piece of propaganda (as opposed to too much of Sinclair’s work which was propaganda first, last, and always). Therefore, it is not surprising that within a year of its appearance in American bookstores this novel was translated into Hungarian and published in Hungary.

Still, the motivations of the original Hungarian translator, Károlyné Baross, were neither overtly literary nor directly concerned with industrial exploitation. Instead, she hoped that the availability of *The Jungle* in Hungary would make Hungarians think at least twice before deciding to immigrate to a country which featured diseased food and poisonous working conditions.

But Professor Vadon is quick to point out that *The Jungle* was read and appreciated by “literate working class readers,” who regarded Sinclair as “their own writer,” and who did not hesitate to declare him the “socialist writer” that he remained.

And no doubt Sinclair would have been pleased, proud as he was of his dual commitment to a craft (writing) and a cause (socialism). Which was primary for Upton Sinclair? That is impossible to say, because his two careers were so thoroughly intertwined. What can be said is that the young Sinclair was first a writer. And far from being a writer of socialist novels or socialist tracts he was a writer of jokes and pulp fiction. In sum, he wrote for that most capitalistic of reasons: to earn a living.

Money was not a plentiful commodity in a household composed of an impoverished mother and her precocious son, Sinclair’s alcoholic father having abandoned his small family for a life of drinking and dissipation. Young Upton did have a possible escape: He could have become a permanent foster son to his mother’s wealthy sister. But loyalty to his mother led him to reject any such overture. Instead, he

set to work as a writer with a singlemindedness that was only matched by his subsequent devotion to socialism.

Sinclair did permit himself a few diversions along the way to immortality. In his early twenties he discovered that gambling was his "vice." Throughout his life tennis provided him an occasional respite from work. And between twenty-two and his octogenarian years he did manage to acquire three wives, a son, and a comfortable income.

Nonetheless, Upton Sinclair was never the stereotypical poor boy who wanted to become rich. In the first place, time spent with his affluent cousins taught him that life for the rich was not necessarily trouble free. Secondly, he discovered socialism sometime in his mid-twenties. Improbable as it seems, Sinclair claimed that he had had no awareness of socialism—and only a vague understanding of populism—until the early years of the administration of Theodore Roosevelt.

Roosevelt, who adamantly opposed socialism, had little reason to fear Sinclair's brand of it. Never did Upton Sinclair so much as flirt with the idea that socialism was to be achieved at the point of a gun. In fact, he never wavered from his belief that the ballot box was the only way to bring socialism to any country. Finally, his socialist utopia was essentially a middle class utopia where intelligent people, gifted people, rational people set the tone for a society of order, virtue, and equality. As a socialist, Sinclair's central tenet was that economic inequality was at the root of every evil that beset society. His guiding assumption was that the elimination of that brand of inequality would automatically usher in a society without conflict.

But in the meantime there was plenty of conflict in Sinclair's private life, not to mention plenty of social conflict available for him to excoriate in book after book. A professionally driven Upton Sinclair generally tried to avoid personal conflict by essentially ignoring his first wife and only son. He was also so inadequate at playing the role of provider that his father-in-law removed his daughter and grandson from the writer's home. When the family was reunited it was in a leaky cabin near Princeton, New Jersey, a cabin from which the nominal head of the household escaped to write hour after solitary hour in a nearby tent

which just happened to be dry. The result of those efforts was a Civil War novel which he called *Manassas*. This book was not a financial success, but it did lead directly to the writing and serializing of *The Jungle* through the popular socialist periodical, "The Appeal of Reason."

Despite tireless efforts and a genius for self-promotion (Like the American impresario, P. T. Barnum, Upton Sinclair held to the axiom that any publicity was good publicity.), Sinclair did not produce a novel to match *The Jungle* for a number of years, if ever. *Jimmie Higgins*, published in 1919, perhaps came close. Vadon calls it one of the "best known and most important works of anti-war socialist literature." Written in part to atone for his curious support for the American decision to enter World War I, Sinclair's novel also endorsed the Bolshevik Revolution. It was, Vadon, concludes, the work in which Sinclair "came closest to the philosophy of marxism." In all, the novel received two Hungarian translations and was made into a film in the Soviet Union.

But Sinclair remained a missionary socialist, not a doctrinaire marxist. That point of view was clearly expressed in many of his post-1920 books. And because of that point of view his continued popularity in Hungary was due in no small measure to the efforts of socialist magazines and newspapers.

According to Lehel Vadon, between 1920 and 1945 Upton Sinclair was "one of the most widely read socialist writers in Hungary." But he was also a writer whose works were the subject of great debate within Hungary. To some Hungarian critics, his "individualistic socialist philosophy" was inadequately proletarian. To more "bourgeois critics" he was a writer with a pedestrian prose style and an inability to create compelling fictional characters.

Despite these deficiencies, Sinclair did not lack for Hungarian readers and commentaries. Professor Vadon details a series of Sinclair productions that resonated with Hungarians. In fact, it was the contention of more than one Hungarian critic that through the early 1930s there were troubling similarities between the "historic situations" in Hungary and America. Reactionary regimes were in power in both

countries. More than that, fascism was on the rise in the form of the Horthy police and the California police force. Hungarian and American workers were both learning “first hand” about the consequences of reactionary “terror.”

Despite his outspoken opposition to fascism Upton Sinclair consistently refused to align himself with communists. Unlike many American liberals who became enchanted with Soviet communism, Sinclair remained a democratic socialist who was suspicious of communism. He could be accused of faddism in that he could be seduced by any number of “quack cures” for what ailed society in general and its members in particular. Vegetarianism, prohibitionism, spiritualism, and sex hygiene campaigns did at various times have a devotee in Upton Sinclair. But never was the fad—or the reality—of communism attractive to him.

At the same time it must be said that Sinclair was quite capable of shutting the horrors of Soviet communism out of his mind. And if, for example, the facts of Stalin’s purges did penetrate his defenses, he refused to criticize Soviet Russia publicly. Having made a long private practice of ignoring family responsibilities and emotional commitments, he made a lengthy public career of ignoring the consequences of idealism and power run amok in Lenin’s and Stalin’s Russia.

Why? Perhaps his first wife put it best: “He (Sinclair) is a Conservative by instinct and a radical by choice.” His second wife, Mary Craig Kimbrough sized her husband up a bit differently: “Upton Sinclair knows nothing about human nature, except that he is determined to change it.” What may be even more relevant to the question at hand is that Sinclair was, according to biographer Leon Harris, an “American romantic.” As such, he was emotionally incapable of embracing or condemning communism.

But Upton Sinclair was never hesitant to condemn American Capitalism, whether it had run amok or not. And Hungarians, notes Vadon, were anxious to read those condemnations. His barely fictionalized attack on John D. Rockefeller and lesser American petroleum barons, *Oil!*, was translated into Hungarian within a year of

its American debut; and it eventually “enjoyed eight publications” in Hungary.

A year later Sinclair published *Boston*, which Hungarian and American critics alike have long considered to be one of his best works. The centerpiece of the story is what Vadon labels the “judicial murder” of two Italian immigrant anarchists Nicolai Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. In retrospect, Sinclair was not so sure that such a label was entirely accurate. According to Harris, he “gradually” became convinced that Sacco and Vanzetti “had at least known about the hold up” (which led to the murder of the payroll guards for which the two men stood trial). In the final analysis Sinclair tended to agree with local Boston radicals who thought that “Sacco was guilty and Vanzetti knew it.” But whatever his speculations about their guilt or innocence, Sinclair was certain that they had not received a fair trial.

Sinclair did entertain more than idle hope that *Boston* would bring him at least a Pulitzer, if not a Nobel prize. His casual friend and occasional correspondent, H. L. Mencken, thought that Sinclair had no business accepting the latter: “A man who hates capitalism as ardently as Upton Sinclair could not conceivably accept money from a dynamite manufacturer.”

There was no need to worry. Sinclair would never win either prize. By 1934 another prize loomed before him: the governorship of California. Now fifty-six, Sinclair was not exactly a political novice. As a socialist he had run and lost a New Jersey congressional race years earlier. In 1931 Norman Thomas approached him to run for president on the socialist ticket. Three years later Sinclair would resign from the Socialist Party to run for governor as a Democrat and on his EPIC (End Poverty in California) pledge.

Tired of the socialist schisms, sick of losing and being ignored, Sinclair decided that part of the problem was the word “socialist” itself. Hence his decision to register as a Democrat and pitch his appeal in the direction of the “ruined middle class.” Fellow Democrats Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt did not immediately spurn their new ally, but they pointedly refused to endorse his candidacy. So did most of

Hollywood, Charlie Chaplin and a very few others excepted. In fact, movie magnate Louis B. Mayer led the forces against Sinclair. Studios threatened to move to Florida if Sinclair won. Fake newsreels were deployed against him. In sum, a then astonishing \$10,000,000 was spent to defeat him. In this instance, money did a good deal of talking. Sinclair lost by approximately 350,000 votes out of 2.5 million cast. Never again would he run for elective office.

If the career of Upton Sinclair, the politician, was over, the career of Sinclair, the writer, was not. Professor Vadon chronicles the publications and Hungarian of many more Upton Sinclair books, including his autobiography, which received two Hungarian translations and which H. L. Mencken thought was Sinclair's best work.

But Upton Sinclair's popularity in Hungary was not necessarily without interruption. After 1949 serious, sustained criticism of his works could be found in Hungarian periodicals and scholarly journals. Suddenly, Vadon writes, Sinclair was being dismissed as a "vacillating pseudo-writer, a gutless unprincipled careerist with the political views of a fascist." Such harsh attacks were followed by something arguably worse: silence. Between the late 1940s and the late 1950s virtually nothing was written about Upton Sinclair in Hungary. Why?

It is Vadon's contention that the Cold War was doing its best to freeze out all non-communist, non-marxist writers, the socialist Upton Sinclair included. In effect, he was put on the "blacklist," thereby denying the Hungarian reading public access to his works. Not until the 1960s and Hungarian thaw of the larger Cold War was he "restored to grace."

Among the first Upton Sinclair books to find their way back into the hands of Hungarian readers were the eleven volumes (and 7,364 pages) of the *Lanny Budd* series. As an overall literary work this series was, in Vadon's choice words, "worse than the best of Sinclair's art," but nonetheless readers in Hungary and elsewhere "greedily devoured" each new volume.

Nazi sympathizers and Soviet sympathizers alternately took Sinclair to task for his alleged anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet leanings. As we

have seen, Sinclair leaned most decisively in the anti-Nazi direction. That he was subjected to attacks from the right should not be surprising. But Professor Vadon is interested in examining the critics to Sinclair's left. It is noteworthy that democratic socialist Upton Sinclair first received acclaim in Hungary because of his commitment to that version of socialism. A half century later Upton Sinclair was still firmly in the democratic socialist camp. But for a time during the height of the Cold War that very commitment to democratic socialism was more than enough to call his immortality into question—at least in what once constituted the “Soviet bloc” countries. Lehel Vadon has painstakingly charted Upton Sinclair's flirtations with immortality—and official death—and rebirth—in Hungary. Let us be thankful for this historian's efforts. And let us all hope that Sinclair's future rests on his literary merits—or demerits—and not on the machinations of political regimes, east or west.

CSABA CZEGLÉDI

ANDREW VÁZSONYI: *TÚL A KECEGÁRDÁN, CALUMET-
VIDÉKI AMERIKAI MAGYAR SZÓTÁR*

[Beyond Castle Garden: An American Hungarian Dictionary
of the Calumet Region].

Edited and introduction by Miklós Kontra.

A Magyarságkutatás könyvtára XV.

Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 1995. 242 pp.

Beyond Castle Garden is a unique dialect dictionary—and more. Two of its prominent features make it a particularly important book: (1) The dictionary was compiled on the basis of tape-recorded actual language use and (2) it is the first, last, and only record of a now extinct variety of Hungarian.

Given the startling rate at which languages disappear on this planet, *Beyond Castle Garden* is an especially valuable document. The vast majority of the world's languages are moribund. Around 1990, merely five speakers of Iowa were alive, only two old people spoke the Eyak language of Alaska as their native language, and the Ubykh language of the Northwest Caucasus, a record holder among the world's languages boasting some 80 consonants, had no more than a single speaker. At the same time, only 2 of the 20 native languages of Alaska were still spoken by children, 80% of the 187 languages of North America and Canada were on the verge of extinction, and 90% of the 250 aboriginal languages of Australia were "VERY near extinction"

(Krauss 1992:4—5). Many of the languages that were moribund a few years ago are probably extinct now.

Every time the last speaker of an unrecorded language dies his language dies with him, and with each language gone the diversity of the phenomenon of natural language as well as our chance to better understand its nature suffers. It is an ecological, if not a cultural, commonplace that the diversity of the fauna and flora is mankind's invaluable heritage. The diversity of natural languages is no less valuable for linguistic research. Therefore it is hard to overestimate the significance of records of endangered languages or languages that have, by now, become extinct.

The set of extinct or endangered languages and dialects is larger than many of us would have imagined, and it is growing at an astonishing rate. Many people may not have known that only fairly recently the set of extinct languages gained a new member. A variety of Hungarian which was still spoken some thirty years ago by a community of Hungarian-American immigrants in the Calumet region, south-east of Chicago, is now gone forever. *Beyond Castle Garden* is the first and only record of this short-lived dialect—American Hungarian (AH).

In addition to the significance of its AH data for a better understanding of language contact phenomena in general and the processes of interference, borrowing, and language loss, *Beyond Castle Garden* has plenty to offer to the general reader as well. It contains some instructive reading for those interested not only in the language but also in the life and culture of a community of Hungarians who once lived in the Calumet region. To more linguistically minded readers, it offers a concise introduction to some basic sociolinguistic concepts and issues, such as language contact, bilingualism, interference, code switching, etc.

The book opens with two short prefaces—one in Hungarian (Előszó, 6) and one in English (Preface, 7), both written by Miklós Kontra, in which the editor introduces the reader to the compiler Andrew Vázsonyi and his wife and co-fieldworker Linda Dégh, who

went out to study the “lifestyles, traditions, and language of Hungarian-Americans living in the industrial settlements of the Calumet region on Lake Michigan” in the mid-1960s (7).

In the *Bevezető*/Introduction (8—18/19—24), the editor first tells us briefly about the history and genesis of the dictionary (8—9/19). An explanation of some differences between its first part, which was written by Andrew Vázsonyi and is published in its original form, and the second part written by Miklós Kontra “on the basis of Vázsonyi’s cards” (9—10/20—21) is followed by a description of its character, pointing to some special features that make the dictionary unique in the context of Hungarian as well as international lexicography (10—14/21). Then the editor outlines the structure of entries (15—16/22—23) and discusses “some problems with the data” (17—18/23—24). Incorporated in the *Bevezető* is a short essay on code switching, borrowing, and language interference in bilingual speakers (13—14).

The *Bevezető* and the Introduction are followed by the *Szótár* (Dictionary) (26—125) with a total of 1149 AH headwords. Each entry contains part of speech specification of the headword, its meaning, the model English word which was the source of the AH headword, the meaning of the model (which normally repeats the meaning specification for the AH headword), example sentences, each with the monogram of the informant from whom the sentence was recorded, and occasional references to the frequency of usage of the headword in AH.

The dictionary is followed in turn by two essays in Hungarian, which surround a section of short and highly informative biographies of the informants, also in Hungarian (156—180). The first essay is by Linda Dégh (Andrew Vázsonyi’s wife and collaborator), in which she discusses the style, attitude, and research method of her husband as well as the culture and language of Hungarian-Americans in the Calumet region (126—155). The essay by Andrew Vázsonyi on the life of Calumet region Hungarian-Americans appears in Hungarian translation. The key category of the essay is the “star boarder,” a major

character in the life of the Hungarian immigrant community (181—196).

The appendices include two excerpts from Vázsonyi's notes on certain lexicographic and linguistic problems (197—199) and four Hungarian interview transcripts discussing the learning, knowledge, and preservation of Hungarian in America (200—205).

The penultimate section of the book is the Index, an alphabetic list of the English model words with their AH loan word counterparts (206—220).

Finally, appended to the dictionary are documents and photographs depicting the life of American Hungarians. These include, among other things, a photograph of the Castle Garden, a map of the Calumet region (where, unfortunately, some of the place names appear in such small print that they are extremely difficult to make out), a photograph of Andrew Vázsonyi from 1967, and a reproduction of a page from Vázsonyi's original typescript.

Undoubtedly, the most valuable part of *Beyond Castle Garden* is the dictionary, which is based on a collection of "'Hunglish' words and dialogs" on cards from 120 tapes of interviews with 140 informants conducted between 1964 and 1967. The most interesting feature of the dictionary from a lexicographic point of view is no doubt the fact that "the examples are not invented sentences but instances of actual spoken language use—a feature of this dictionary which became an innovation of English lexicography only in 1987 when the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* was published" (21).

The dictionary in *Beyond Castle Garden* is an invaluable document of a now extinct variety of American Hungarian, which, as the editor points out, is thus rescued for posterity (21). If it is appropriate to say that Andrew Vázsonyi, the original compiler of the dictionary, rescued AH for posterity, it is equally appropriate to say that Miklós Kontra, the editor, rescued Andrew Vázsonyi's manuscript and cards for aftertime. Had it not been for the editor's determination to finish the work that Vázsonyi's death in 1986 prevented the collector and compiler from

completing, many of us might never even have heard of this variety of American Hungarian.

Interestingly, the motivation for Linda Dégh, the initiator of the project, to go and study the language of Hungarian immigrants in America derived from field work she had conducted among peasant communities in Hungary, collecting folk stories in Szabolcs and Szatmár. She says there was practically no family without some American connection there (127—28). This may explain why research focused on peasant immigrants who had settled in America between 1900 and 1928 and their descendants.

Andrew Vázsonyi was a writer and journalist by profession. He had received training in law, philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology, and was attracted to the idea of research into the life and language of Hungarians in America through the interest he shared with his wife in folk stories (128). His broad education in the humanities and lack of that in linguistics might explain his prescriptive approach to language use and some rather unorthodox decisions he occasionally took on matters of language and lexicography. His prescriptive attitude often reveals itself in characterizations of AH as a “corrupt language” with a “distorted pronunciation” and “twisted words” (198).

Any lexicographer faces the difficult task of deciding what to include and what not to include in his or her dictionary. Some arbitrariness in making such decisions is often inevitable. In Vázsonyi’s case, the difficulty was aggravated by having to decide what was and what was not AH in the speech of Hungarian-Americans. Vázsonyi adopted the following principle in selecting his material: He required of words-to-be-recorded in the dictionary that they “occur in Hungarian syntax with Hungarian suffixation, etc.,” but “a distortion of words as dictated by the rules of Hungarian” was not a condition of inclusion (198).

There are two problems with the requirement that AH lexical items occur in Hungarian syntax. The first concerns the very notion of Hungarian syntax. Although it is obvious that English was the lexifier for AH, with the substrate language retaining much of its syntax, it is

equally clear that the syntax of AH was not left intact by English. Thus, the syntactic phenomena of AH are often hard to characterize specifically either as Hungarian or as English. Indeed, AH often exhibits syntactic properties of both languages, which is evident from data recorded in the dictionary, such as, for example, *Csak akrosz a striten voltak tőlem* ('They were across the street from me') (s.v. *akrosz*). This is like English and unlike Hungarian in that it contains a prepositional phrase (*akrosz a striten*), and it is like Hungarian and unlike English in that the noun phrase complement of the preposition is inflected for case.

The principles of determining which language a particular idiom is a dialect of and the principles of determining whether a particular idiom is to be regarded as a dialect of some language or a separate language are far from clear-cut. Language boundaries tend to be determined partly on arbitrary grounds and, only too often, the linguistic principles are "supplemented" with political, geographic, cultural, and perhaps other linguistically irrelevant considerations. We must, in this respect, give credit to Andrew Vázsonyi for admitting that the selection was carried out on the basis of rather "subjective" criteria and assumptions.

It may not have been the best decision on Andrew Vázsonyi's part to let Gyula Décsi dissuade him from employing phonetic representations in the dictionary entries. Vázsonyi admits that the pronunciation of words was a consideration in deciding what should and what should not be included in the dictionary. He had decided, for instance, to ignore "English words which were pronounced correctly, without Hungarian suffixes by a fluent speaker of English whose English was perhaps even better than his or her Hungarian" (197). It goes, again, to Andrew Vázsonyi's credit that at least he honestly admits that "the selection [was] to a certain extent subjective. You simply feel whether [a particular word] was used as an element of Pidgin-Hungarian or in quotation marks, so to speak" (197).

Intuitive speculation about AH pronunciation is dodgy. A more careful analysis of the pronunciation of AH words and their English models might have revealed, for example, that *stritt* is probably not an

instance of spelling pronunciation (199). The initial [ʃ] in AH *stritt* is very likely not a result of the combined influence of the spelling of English *street* and the phonetic value ([ʃ]) of the letter *s* in Hungarian. There are varieties of American English in which the initial sound in words like *street*, *strong*, *straight*, etc. is considerably palatalized into a [ʃ]-like sound with the effect that this variant of /s/ may very easily have been perceived by Hungarians as a “Hungarian [ʃ],” for which they may have substituted the phonetically closest Hungarian consonant, pronounced in words like *strandtáska* (‘beach bag’).

It is often equally difficult to identify the source of an AH word on an intuitive basis. Vázsonyi himself might have suspected that the AH verb *faniz* meaning “‘tréfál vkivel’” (72) may not have been a direct loan of *make fun*, which has a similar meaning in English. Thus, the query after the model expression in the entry of *faniz* probably has a different function than in the entry of *bréráj*. In the latter, it seems to indicate the uncertain origin of the word, but in the former it is very likely an indication of the *compiler’s* uncertainty concerning the way the model word should be given. The expression *make fun*, given as the model for the AH headword *faniz*, does have a similar meaning but it quite obviously cannot have been the model for the AH word. As a matter of fact, there was probably no direct model for this word at all, but it may have been derived language internally from the AH word *fani*, meaning ‘funny’.

One must also be careful with the semantic characterization of AH words. The meaning of AH *diferál* is, quite simply, incorrectly given in the dictionary. The examples in the entry clearly show that *diferál* does not mean “‘különbözik’” (‘differ’, ‘be different’) but that it means ‘makes a difference’ (‘számít’, ‘fontos’, ‘nem mindegy’). Consider these examples in the entry of *diferál*: *Az nem diferál nekem* (‘That makes no difference to me’, cf. Standard Hungarian (SH) *Az nekem nem számít*), *Száz dollár, az már diferál* (‘A hundred dollars—that makes a difference’, cf. SH *Száz dollár, az már számít*). Similarly, AH *diferensz*, *diferenc* also do not only mean “‘különbség’” (‘difference’) as in *Ötezer dollár a diferenc* (‘The difference is five thousand dollars’, cf. SH *Ötezer*

dollár a különbség), but in the sense illustrated by the examples below they are synonymous with the AH verb *diferál* ('makes a difference') in sentences like *Itt nem diferensz, hogy ki hú* ('Here, it makes no difference who is who', cf. SH *Itt nem számít, hogy ki kicsoda*). Note that 'különbség' would yield the SH "translation" **Itt nem különbség, hogy ki kicsoda*, which is not even grammatical.

For all its blemishes, which basically stem from the apparently insufficient training in linguistics the compiler Andrew Vázsonyi had had, *Beyond Castle Garden* is an important book, whose chief value for the researcher is that it preserves a fragment of an exotic variety of Hungarian. Dialects that emerge in contact situations, such as AH, may be of special interest since they often exhibit features not found in mainstream language varieties. Therefore *Beyond Castle Garden* is a valuable source not only on language contact phenomena but on the structure of language in general.

WORK CONSULTED

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ATTILA KÓSZEGHY

“NEW-DIRTY-POSTLITERATE-POP-LO-CAL-K-MART”

On American Minimalist Fiction in the 1970s and 1980s

(Abádi Nagy Zoltán: *Az amerikai minimalista próza*,

Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 1994.)

Abádi Nagy's book is clearly structured into two equally important parts. The author gathers his critical observations on his primary material in the first one, "American Minimalist Fiction: Authors and Works." While the second part which balances the first and contains the author's theoretical considerations about American Minimalism is titled "American Minimalist Fiction: the Minimalist World View and the Characteristics of Minimalist Aesthetics and Philosophy." Balance is obtained by the author, who uses his primary material in the first section of his book to draw conclusions in the second. Consequently it is the second half of the book which contains the bulk of the author's theoretical considerations. However, for the vast majority of Hungarian readers, the second, theoretical part could hardly be understood without the first one. For example, none of the ten novels that Abádi Nagy introduces here have been translated into Hungarian. Therefore the first part is essential to the understanding of the second. Had the book been published in English for the American public, it would very likely have had a different structure altogether.

The first part opens with a preliminary chapter on minimalism. This chapter is, almost apologetically, devoted to the critical helter-skelter around the phenomenon. “Minimalism in American literature is the phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s. It makes its first appearance in the late sixties. Its main representatives, Raymond Carver and Ann Beattie, had already had a marked influence on a younger generation in the seventies. In the eighties minimalism became the strongest hue registered by critics”¹(21). The reason for the apologetic tone of the introductory chapter is that the term itself has not yet “settled” in American literary criticism. “Many critics had tried to label this new phenomenon in many different ways before they tolerated, rather than generally accepted, the term ‘minimalism’” (25). Many, more or less witty, labels are collected from various critics’ articles, and the author defends his own choice (minimalism). “‘Dirty Realism’ reminds him of the realism of the ‘muck-rakers’ at the turn of this century”(27). “The vague and insipid ‘New Realism’ is a term without critical judgement. Critics who use it either speak about the return to Realism or about the ‘renewal’ of Realism when they talk about minimalism”(27). “The inventor of the term ‘Pop Realism’ might have born in mind the fact that minimalist writers use the products of the American pop culture and consumerism in their stories and novels so often... and the very layer of society whose days are flooded by these products”(27). Labels like “TV Fiction”, “Coke Fiction”, “Diet-Pepsi minimalism”, “Lo-Cal Fiction”, “Freeze-Dried Fiction” among others miss their target by being satirical as if the authors of this type of fiction were also satirical about their characters, whereas they “highlight these objects, facts, occupations simply because these things master their characters’ lives, and not (or very rarely) because they want to be satirical about their own characters or want to ridicule them”(27).

¹ Abádi Nagy Zoltán, *Az amerikai minimalista próza* (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 1994) 21. [quotations from this edition hereafter will be bracketed () in the text]

Terms like “K-Mart Realism”, “Designer Realism”, “High Tech Realism”, etc. differ only slightly from the group above. They are right in the sense “that is to say: the world of minimalist fiction is equipped with objects available in K-Marts and is peopled by the customers of K-Marts”(28). “Designer Realism,” on the other hand, has another relevant, if latent, aspect “that might emphasize the fact that minimalists focus on and accentuate the surface level of reality”(28). Whereas “High Tech Fiction” might have a double connotation: “1/ a type of fiction that deals with people living in the world of High Technology; 2/ fiction of High Technology, a fiction that can tell us a lot by showing a few things only”(28).

A third group of labels indicate a sociological bias: “White Trash Fiction”, “Postliterate Literature”, “hick chic” and others of this type demonstrate that their inventors found the people in these stories and novels most often come from an easily definable segment of American society: “Minimalist fiction is the literary record of the sociology of the poor, the drifters, the criminals of industrial suburbs and small country towns, the workers and lower-middle-class (or very rarely middle-middle class) citizens of America”(262). However complete this sociological reading of minimalism seems to be, it is not the sociological aspect of this fiction that remarkably distinguishes it.

A brief section following the description of the abundance of the recently coined new terms, is devoted to a short overview of the history of the term (minimalism) in music and visual arts. Abádi Nagy, when comparing minimalist music to minimalist fiction, points out that “short phrases and slow motion is a characteristic of minimalist fiction, as well”(30). He concludes, however, that the term (minimalism) in music does not offer a key to understanding the same term in fiction. The same critical term in visual arts offers more. The author proves that the term itself, as it is used in literary criticism, “is entering the critical paraphernalia from the direction of visual arts”(33). Although both visual artists and fiction writers of the minimalist style turn to the surface level of reality and would prefer “taking objects directly from everyday reality”(32) into their world, the author reminds us that

minimalism in American fiction is "*significantly different*" (33) from what is meant by minimalism in visual arts.

"The Hyper-Realist painter/sculptor has to possess every skill of his craft in order to be able to produce his art - his paraphernalia is rich again. The minimalist prose writer, on the other hand, is diminishing his own. The two extremes of using and neglecting devices still produce something very similar - worlds of neat, polished surfaces. This is how the two types of art can be associated." (35)

The simingly similar shining surfaces differ-as described above-in the process of creation.

The introductory chapter in the first part of the book ends with a collection of attempted definitions of contemporary critics and a list of the names of the authors. This list ranges from James Atlas' early endeavor, "Less Is Less" in 1981, through Josef Jarab's (Czechoslovakia) "The Stories of the New Lost Generation" in 1988 to Utz Riese's (Germany) "Postmodern Negativity and Minimalism: The Realism of Raymond Carver" in 1990. What most of these definitions seem to be realizing in the works of the minimalists is that these stories are "deprived of epiphanies and revelations" (41) (James Atlas); they show the "belly-side" (41) of everyday life (Bill Buford). The lives of its characters are isolated from any community and the thinly narrow prose of the minimalists (42) could hardly bear the burden of the past or the future (Michael Gorra) therefore it is the literature of the Present. The "intentionally impoverished equipment" (42) of the minimalists is the consequence of an intentional turn away from the hysterically over-refined fictional worlds of the postmodern (Charles Newman). Minimalists could find their way back to the reader who had been alienated by the postmodernists (43). Minimalism, especially after the second generation, is a kind of documentarist literature which is not depriving fiction from its own devices but is renewing and expanding its possibilities (Kim A. Herzinger). It is a sheer "Life-style Fiction" (43) (Joe David Bellamy). The minimalist author "retains

information”(43) in the narration that makes this prose what it really is (Linsey Abrams). Minimalists, most often, deal with the surface and it is “the prose of an opaque vision”(43). Authors are not concerned about the “great themes” of literature(Robert Dunn). The minimalist writer has a bias in favor of the objective world(44) (Diane Stevenson), and they, instead of expanding, are reducing the possibilities of plot. They are obsessed with the details of the surface while they intentionally neglect the social differences among the people they talk about(44)(Madison Bell). John Barth calls it a “realist or hyper-realist cold fiction”(44) that “can tell us a lot but it has nothing to do with the actual length of the story”(44), it is a “concise, associative, realist or hyper-realist”(44) prose. The critical opinions and attitudes collected here vary from that of the writer of “The Literary Brat Pack” (45)(Bruce Bawer), an article of vehement hostility towards minimalism, to Tom Wolfe’s literary “manifesto-like article”(46) in Harper’s Magazine, in which he talks about an “anesthetic fiction” that maneuvers microscopic domestic situations set mainly in small town America. From among the European ‘critical angles’ Abádi Nagy chooses Marc Chenetier’s “Living On/Off The ‘Reserve,’” which is written solely about Raymond Carver’s stories but “whose observations concerning the performance nature and interrogative characteristics of Carver’s prose can be valid to describe the whole phenomenon of minimalism”(47).

The introductory chapter closes with a thematic grouping of minimalist authors. Abádi Nagy arranges the authors into the following groups: 1/ the generation of the 1970s, 2/ the generation of the 1980s and 3/ borderline-writers, for writers whose work can only partially be categorized as part of the minimalist movement.

The chapter devoted to the minimalist writers of the 1970s contains the following names: Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, Frederick Barthelme, Joy Williams, Bobbie Ann Mason, Jayne Anne Phillips, Richard Ford and Mary Robison. The chapter for the minimalists of the 1980s lists its authors as: Tobias Wolff, Elizabeth Tallent, David Leavitt, Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis, while the chapter for the

“borderline cases” includes Alice Adams, Toby Olson and Annie Dillard. Each writer in each chapter is introduced in a short biographical sketch, followed by an introductory piece based on the general characteristics of his/her art. Then works (usually a novel or a volume of short fiction, or both, when possible) considered highly characteristic of the author are discussed in detail. Abádi Nagy presents the reader with a convincing amount of primary material: *159 short stories and 10 novels by the sixteen authors*—as listed above—are given *thematic analyses* in the successive three chapters. The author admits though how differently some other critics may make their own list of minimalists, the reader can feel safe: no work of real significance that has been associated with minimalism in these two decades is missing from this list. All this provides a solid foundation of primary works on which the author builds up the second, theoretic part of his book.

“The World View of American Minimalism — The Characteristics of Minimalist Aesthetics and Philosophy”

Abádi Nagy divides this part of his book up into four main chapters: 1/ “The World View of Minimalism”, 2/ “The Formal Characteristics of Minimalist Fiction”, 3/ “The Relationship Between Minimalism and Postmodernism”, and 4/ “Conclusion and Definition”.

1/

The chapter, “The World View of Minimalism,” is divided into two subchapters: 1/ “The Minimalist Interpretation of the Human Character,” and 2/ “The Image of America in Minimalist Fiction.”

The American minimalist writer “returns to the world of reality, and portrays man directly taken out of it. The perspectives of the Universe, its deeper interrelationships are covered by the close-up of the man in the foreground”(221). What intrigues the author here is why American minimalist authors focus *exclusively* on the individual.

Why is the social aspect almost entirely excluded? Why is the world of the minimalist writer shrunk and forced into the shell of individual existence?

“Minimalist literature minimalizes the self”(222) says Abádi Nagy using the same terms as Christopher Lash in *The Minimal Self*, proving, though, that the two terms are different.(Christopher Lash focuses on the phenomenon of the postmodern and draws his examples from among postmodernists, too.) However, Abádi Nagy admits, these two different uses of ‘minimalism’ are not that far away either, since “minimalist fiction, in a sense, is radically different from postmodern literature, while, in another sense, it is a product of the postmodern”(223). By this Abádi Nagy means that the shrunken, private worlds of the minimalists “can be viewed, in a very general sense, as the survival of postmodernist solipsism”(223). Abádi Nagy also accepts Lash’s conclusion that “minimalism refers not just to a particular style in an endless succession of styles but to a widespread conviction that art can survive only by a drastic restriction of its field of vision”(224). The focus of the minimalist’s camera is on the everyday life of the individual and the photo is taken with “a hair-raising verisimilitude”(225).

The minimal self is reduced but not “devalued or defected, ... it is a personality of full social and psychological capacity, who, for some reason though, is not acting and behaving like one”(226). Abádi Nagy distinguishes four types of the reduced self. Two of them are produced in such a way that the reader cannot get a full picture of the character “because the writer prevents us from getting close to the full personality”(227); therefore, the reduced self is part of the minimalist author’s strategy of portrayal and not a matter of the character’s psychology. The two other types concern the nature of the characters.

The first of the four types is the “man of after-effects,” who is “the man after the trauma, after the crisis, after the decision”(227). The story/novel does not show a hero’s way to a climax (in any sense) but it shows us “the vacuum, the apathy, the depression, the drifting of the hero, the self-narcosis” after the decisive event. The minimalist

protagonist is a traumatized self, someone who had suffered from something some time “*before* the opening sentence of the story or the novel”(228). That *something* in his past could easily explain his reactions in the present, but the writer is not willing to tell us *all* about that. Still, this hero “actually is an undiminished personality whom the reader meets in a phase of his life when something decisive has already happened to him”(228).

The reader sees as much of the “phenomenological man,” the second type, as he sees of others in real life. “The minimalist character is a casual acquaintance”(231) whose internal reactions we might guess from his gestures. This way it is again the minimalist author who reduces the character by not showing more of it. “This method of retaining information about the character produces a feeling in the reader that the hero has a reduced self, and that is what I call ‘phenomenological’”(231). There is no longer an “omniscient author who could tell us what we cannot see”(232). But if the reader watches carefully “few things can mean a lot”(232). Abádi Nagy quotes Annie Dillard’s book, *Living by Fiction*, when describing the minimalist author’s attitude to his/her character: “We no longer examine the interior lives of characters much like ourselves. Instead, we watch from afar a caravan of alien grotesques”(230—231).

With the third type of self reduction we enter the realm of the reduced selves in a proper psychological sense. Abádi Nagy calls it the “anesthetized self”. “This is where the literary self-reduction gets closest to the sociological phenomenon of the minimal self”(234). This type of self-reduction is a “sheer fact of social-psychology. It is a fact of the psychology of the character and not an illusion caused by the character-painting device of the writer”(234). The minimalist hero is not just vulnerable, “but most often is a wounded man”(235) and uses all kinds of narcosis. This narcosis is “an escapist reaction”(234) says Abádi Nagy.

The “inarticulate man” is the last of the four types. S/he is the one who is “incapable of communicating the basic problems of his/her life. Perhaps even incapable of verbalizing them for himself/herself” (237).

But, as Abádi Nagy emphasizes, “due to the phenomenological approach of the writer, relevant pieces of information might as well be missing. And this is not a consequence of the inarticulate quality of the character”(238).

Abádi Nagy repeatedly states that the above types of the minimalised self most often appear in an entanglement with each other in the actual context of the individual works. There are no protagonists (or just very rarely) who are the sheer representatives of one or another from among the four types above. This categorization is still relevant, for one of these types is usually dominant in most characters and they help us in understanding how the aesthetic strategies of the minimalist author work.

From among the possible strategies of survival for the character with reduced self, Abádi Nagy names two: “disengagement” (from society) and “apathetic survival”. What he calls “disengagement” is not new in literature. For Joyce and the moderns the world was alienating, their characters were either paralyzed or they escaped society and developed a set of different values. For the postmodernist writer the world is a chaos that cannot be defined or escaped(238). What the minimalist writer preserves from the postmodern is its world-as-chaos-feeling, but the author

“turning back towards realism/modernism places the character from the absurd world of the postmodern back into a recognizable reality. Though, unlike modernism, the minimalist writer—indicating a distrust similar to that of the postmodernists—excludes society as responsible for social problems, does not set his/her characters into a community”(238—239).

The minimal self's strategies are validated only in the private, shrunken world of the individual(240). “The traumatized, paralyzed, dissatisfied minimal self who is charged with frustration, disappointment, alienation, who is disturbed and contemplative, most typically disconnects society”(239). It does not mean that the protagonist is

antisocial, it means that s/he is dissociable(240). S/he is not leaving the community as a demonstration (moderism), s/he is just not joining it. "Minimalism, however, is not a pragmatic literature, it is more concerned about recording the present situation: when the personality is dissolved in crime or in narcosis or in an automatized sex of sensuous lust"(242).

When Abádi Nagy discusses his category of the "apathetic survival," we are anticipating some of his conclusions at the end of his book. "The apathy of the minimalist character is not an indication of the insensitivity of the minimalist writer to the negative aspects of reality"(244). The excluded social arena and the apathy of the character are an indication of "skepticism, simply a different, new answer to the same epistemological dilemma of the postmodern.(Skepticism makes minimalism akin to postmodern.)"(244)

No matter how much the "privatized" world of the minimalist protagonist is devoid of society as such, "social effects in an indirect way do infiltrate into the life of the minimalist protagonist"(244). That is to say: "society in minimalist fiction is necessarily and exclusively the American society"(251). What do we learn about American society from minimalist fiction? "American minimalist fiction ... is indicating what is happening in America in the period: the American man of the street is losing his interest in politics"(254). As Abádi Nagy points out, "the political man of radical social change in the US in the 1960s withdraws to a subcommunal level of his privatized world by the 1970s and 1980s"(253). The reasons for this change are more than telling:

"The average American citizen turns away from society. Partly as a consequence of the results of the former movements (the Civil Rights Movement, the end of the Vietnam War); partly disillusioned and started back by the unexpected results (drug consumption as an inheritance of the subcultures of the sixties, AIDS following the sexual revolution) or fed up by the political assassinations of the sixties, by the Watergate case at the beginning of the seventies and then the hostages in Iran (both caused the fall of a president each)... partly because

these movements had exhausted, partly because a new conservative era was just starting and partly because the oil crisis of the mid-seventies resulted in an economic recession, as well.”(254)

As a result of the traumas listed above, the average American man “would not pay attention great social problems are discussed”(255). Abádi Nagy quotes Jayne Anne Phillips’ opinion saying “the American Government and political system, unlike the European ones, isolate their citizen more from politics”(254). If political man is missing, what is there left from America in minimalist fiction? “We have everything here ... that American everyday life produces on minimal-community-level which this style of writing is focussed on ... everything that can be felt by the minimalist hero”(255).

History, also, is absent from minimalist fiction but in a different way because it can never be “entirely excluded from it”(255). But the need ‘to switch off history is coming from the greatest social trauma of post-WW II America:’ “It is the memory of the Vietnam War that leads to the absence of history”(255).

Concerning the sociological background to American minimalist fiction, the author poses the following question: Is there a cultural code to American Minimalism? Abádi Nagy uses A. C. Zijerveld’s *The Abstract Society* to explain the “one-dimensional” world of minimalism. “Postmodern fiction reacted to ‘abstract society’ with visions of surrealistic machinery... Minimalism, on the other hand, ... moves closer to the individual, to the family ... proceeds to a subcommunity level”(261). The next question is whether individuals in minimalist literature still behave “as social creatures”(261). Abádi Nagy’s answer is that “in this prose of quotidian experience the great patterns of social-psychology, the great questions of American society are present in a latent form”(261).

2/

The chapter devoted to the “Formal Characteristics of Minimalist Fiction” contains the following subchapters: “Theory and Method”,

“Problems of Meaning”, “Plot and Secondary Narrative Structure”, “Minimalist Characterization”, “Narrator and Perspective”, “Time and Space in Minimalist Fiction”, “The Imagery of Minimalist Fiction”. The ninety-page-chapter incorporates the theoretical hard core of the book. Even a list of Abádi Nagy’s own terms coined and used here would exceed the limits of a short overview like the present piece. (It is here that Abádi Nagy’s reader might well be puzzled most: why has this book been published in Hungarian? Interested readers could probably read it in English, too, and the author could have saved a lot of his energies by leaving the task of the translation of the *whole book* to a translator.)

Abádi Nagy confesses his creed as a critic in “Theory and Method.” By accepting Wayne C. Booth’s theoretical pluralism he rejects theoretical monism and throughout the chapter (the whole book, too) the author lets “minimalism speak for itself”(282), rather than choose the terminology of one or another critical school and demonstrate how one can force “minimalism to illustrate one or another critical theory”(282).

3/

The chapter, “The Relationship Between Minimalism and Postmodernism,” poses the question that somehow, understandably though, penetrates the whole book. “Is minimalism inside the still flexible boundaries of the postmodern, or is it distinctively beyond them?” Abádi Nagy’s answers are like concentric circles on the surface of a pond: each circle indicates that the pebble is deeper down in the water. “... our short answer is this: minimalism has some of its characteristics in common with postmodernism while some other characteristics make it completely different from postmodernism”(365). The second attempted answer goes like this: “American minimalist fiction is a different aesthetic response to the same postmodern awareness of the World”(365). There is no sense in further simplifying our answer, the author admits, and sets out collecting similarities and dissimilarities.

To begin with Abádi Nagy refers to Zavarzadeh's argument (*The Mythopoetic Reality*) saying that postmodernism finds it impossible to totalize the world. "It is enough to think of the terrains of reality that the subcommunal focus of the minimalists exclude to admit that minimalists have the same feeling of fragmentation as the postmodernists"(366). Causality and the fragmentation of causality is a key issue here for "the problems of causality of the postmodern survive in minimalism"(367). The approach of the writer "might hide the cause(eg. McInerney) or the interrelationship between cause and effect"(367). As a consequence of this feeling of fragmentation and confused causation, there is an "indifference for ideologies"(367) in the postmodern, while minimalism "simply ignores ideologies"(367). It is another common feature of the two that "both elaborate surfaces"(368). Hidden metafictionality is another latent element that ties minimalism to postmodernism despite the fact that "apart from some fragments of metafictionality, we cannot find short stories or novels that are entirely metafictional"(369) among minimalist works.

Abádi Nagy quotes John Barth and Joe David Bellamy as the representatives of a group of critics who believe that discontinuity is stronger between minimalism and postmodernism than continuity. According to Barth minimalism is a revolt against "thick", "baroque-like" fiction of the postmodern(369). Bellamy's conclusion is very similar but he compares the minimalist revolt against the postmodern to John Gardner's revolt against the same in his *On Moral Fiction*. The debate launched by Gardner's book might have had an impact on minimalists who then "might have sensed a 'moral vacuum'"(371). (In connection with Raymond Carver's moral inclinations, for example, Abádi Nagy comments that "he was bound to make the minimalist turn" as he was brought up in a family which had to face "profound problems of survival"(371), he was surrounded by people whose lives were flooded by everyday problems, who were very far away from sophisticated obsessions of the postmodernists. "Postmodernism stripped moments of everyday existence from the dilemma of philosophy ... and placed the stress on philosophy itself. Minimalism on

the other hand replaces man from the abstract worlds into his real environment”(370/371). All other details of dissimilarity are consequences of this “basic shift”(371). Minimalism rejects metaphysical problems and “returns to interpersonal relations, emotional interactions, to the family”(370). With the shift from over-exaggerated, highly fictional worlds to the world of the “real man, minimalism returns to the world beyond the text, ... the non-referential or self-referential [text] ... will become referential, after the subjective visions—objective, external view ... after the great questions—small dimensions ... round characters after the flat characters ... anti-intellectualism after a taste for philosophy”(371). “Ironic imagination” that has been so prevailing in postmodern literature, is no longer dominant, for the minimalist writer is profoundly disturbed by irony(372). “Postmodern parody ... gives way to a precise, clear, elliptical but concise style of smooth prose writing”(372). Abádi Nagy quotes Carver’s famous saying, “no tricks”, from an interview in which Carver speaks about the ethos of writing. Carver and the minimalists are not experimentalists “as a[nother] reaction against post-modernism”(373). In other words: “postmodern prose is radical, minimalism is conservative”(373). And a last but not at all negligible fact that helped this style of writing to produce a new audience for (this)fiction: “minimalism leaves the reader at rest, it does not alienate the reader but brings him/her closer to the world of its own”(373).

Abádi Nagy draws the conclusion that the discontinuity between postmodernism and minimalism is of an aesthetic nature, while the continuity between the two is supported by a similar philosophy behind both. Nevertheless, according to the author “the postmodern attitude at the bottom of aesthetic decisions is much stronger” (373) than it seems to be.

“When minimalists exclude society ... they accept ... the conclusion of postmodern social philosophy ... They turn away from creating new models and theories of society. After all, postmodernists maintain that reality cannot be defined. The minimalist writer accepts the conclusion and neglects ‘abstract

society' ... turns towards the privacy of the individual and it produces an essentially different work of art ... the conclusion of postmodern philosophy results in a fundamentally different aesthetic reaction of the artist.”(374)

The self-referential worlds of the postmodernists are enveloped in fictionality, whereas the referential worlds of the minimalists are enveloped in a banal verisimilitude(375). “... it is not language that disconnects from ‘objective’ reality, but it is the microcosm [of the individual] that detaches from the macrocosm [of the society]”(375). Minimalism “moves things from the foreground to the background”(377) in the postmodern picture. The appearance of the minimalist protagonist indicates the end of an era in literary history which diminished the role of the individual to ‘less than zero’, “we are on our way back to individualism, to a sovereign identity”(375), but the minimalist character is not yet fully prepared for this role.

4/

Before his final definition, and at other places throughout the book, Abádi Nagy warns us about single-sentence-definitions. Nevertheless, it is here where he attempts to condense his conclusions into a short paragraph.

“Since postmoderism up to the present (1990), in the colorfully heterogeneous picture of American fiction, minimalism is the only new phenomenon which represents a group of writers who line up along a unified aesthetic aspiration. The name of the group derives from visual arts. This new style of prose writing on the aesthetic level of creation represents a break with postmodernism. But at the same time it retains many latent (primarily philosophical) premises of postmodernism. It turns away from the ironical, satirical fabulations of the world or the alternative worlds or the philosophical-deconstructionist language based experimentalism of the previous generation with a decision

motivated by postmodern philosophy. Instead of fictionality it chooses reality, it is referential instead of being non-referential.”(379)

Minimalism vs. maximalism. The two terms represent an obvious pair of extremes on a scale of measurement. Here, however, they peacefully delineate two aspects of the same book: its subject matter on the one hand, and its author’s intentions on the other.

Minimalism as we learn it from Abádi Nagy’s ‘maximalist’ book is still a term of some uncertainty in American literary criticism. There are, of course, many critics who can always tell you what the new thing really is. Fortunately Abádi Nagy is not one of them. One of the great merits of this book is that the author intentionally avoids trying to find ‘final answers.’ His way of tackling the problem of minimalism vs. postmodernism, for example, is not void of critical judgement, though. The way he formulates his critical views about the phenomenon has its lessons to the reader. And not only the ones that are apparent from the structure of his book and the ones that Abádi Nagy states as his own philosophy (see quote 282), but also the ones that he implies.

One of the implied lessons is that Abádi Nagy knows what he can tell us with his excessive knowledge of contemporary American fiction and contemporary criticism, and he does that more than thoroughly. He does investigate his primary sources in a systematic way and shares the view and the expertise of the scholar providing the reader with the pleasant feeling of being present with one finger on the pulse of contemporary American Literature. Yet, he also knows clearly enough what the things are that he cannot judge from the point in time where he is (1990) when writing his book, the first comprehensive monograph study of American Minimalist Fiction that has been completed so far.

ZOLTÁN SZILASSY

LEHEL VADON: *MASTERPIECES OF AMERICAN
DRAMA: AN ANTHOLOGY AND INTRODUCTION*

Eger: Eszterházy Károly Tanárképző Főiskola, 1994.

Two Volumes, Vol. I. 602 pp.; Vol. II. 576 pp.

Although a book-review should not also pose as a “list of contents” for the book it is trying to evaluate, in this case I feel inclined to do so. Lehel Vadon’s elegant, impressive, hardcover edition of the abovesaid—in fact, metaphorically speaking, fruitful and, practically speaking, juicy summary of his decades-taking philological and empathy-oriented searches and researches; the two volumes also designed and, author-by-author, introduced by him—features the following unforgettables: E. G. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*; Th. Wilder, *Our Town*; Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*; A. Miller, *Death of a Salesman*; *The Crucible*; T. Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*; *The Glass Menagerie*; E. Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; Sam Shepard, *Buried Child*; LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), *Dutchman*.

This long list of major American playwrights, and their “No.1.” plays, selected for their getting anthologized for Hungarian Americanists (juniors or seniors, as they may be) raises an important question for me: is not the main title of this selection (Masterpieces of American Drama) a teeny bit misleading? Even if quite a number of experts maintain that American Drama—as such—began no sooner than with O’Neill, one still wonders whether “the Americanization of

American Drama”—using Péter Egri’s wording—had not begun a century and half ago?

On the other, somewhat “Hungarianized” hand, tributes must be paid to Lehel Vadon’s selection and his very helpful intros to these items, really masterpieces. The more so, because Vadon’s way of selecting corresponds not only with possible, particular usability of his having selected American dramatic texts (and/or theatrical scenarios) for Hungarians, but quite reliable experts, abroad, seem to testify to his very choices! E.g.: with due consideration to O’Neill’s, T. Williams’, A. Miller’s certain plays being produced (on- /off-off/ Broadway and at university theatres).

Statistics (according to Anta Productions Project Listing; see, Educational Theatre Journal, Oct., 1970, U.S.A.) give preference to items of this selection: to these very plays, not only as classics, never to be forgotten, but also as “old-timers” not only to be “forgiven”, but given another chance!

Getting down to ‘brass-tacks’ and, of course, to Lehel Vadon’s choices: beside Shakespeare (20); O’Neill (10), Williams (11), Miller (8), and Albee (5) seem to have earned most of the productional reputation, from 1960 until 1970.

Another respect, from some of us, must be given to Vadon’s choices if, very possibly “Drama as Cultural Sign: American Dramatic Criticism, 1945—1978”, penned by C. W. E. Bigsby (American Quaterly, Vol. XXX./No. 3, p. 30. & passim)—has helped me to appreciate and re-appreciate things Lehel Vadon has been trying to suggest, namely: that there may be centuries’ and decades’ cultural heritage to wonder upon, but then there come years when one has to ponder. O’Neill, I am afraid,—and with due alteration of details—is the “American Shakespeare”, some Bible to re-interpret, some Homer to be re-read, some Victor Hugo, or Walt Whitman, or Allen Ginsberg to celebrate all these. The anthology testifies to this unique heritage as well as to its no less unique followers.

ANDRÁS TARNÓC

CHARLES SELLERS, NEIL MCMILLEN, AND HENRY
MAY: *AZ EGYESÜLT ÁLLAMOK TÖRTÉNETE*

Budapest: Maecenas Kiadó, 1995. 434 pp.

I

The global disintegration of communism, symbolized by the fall of the infamous Berlin Wall in 1989, not only created new premises for the geopolitical equation, but dramatically altered the cultural and educational sphere of Eastern and Central Europe. As nations heretofore regarded as friends fell by the wayside a new era of intended partnership with the West and the United States was ushered in.

The history of the United States, a topic heretofore superficially treated by most textbooks, became a subject of intense, ideology free scholarly interest. Peter Hahner's translation of Charles Sellers, Henry May, and Neil R. McMillen's *A Synopsis of American History* attempts to respond to the above demand.

II

According to Paul Weiss "men turn to history primarily to learn three truths—how men have changed, what makes men change, and what men are, despite all change." Although such expectations from a narrative history might appear preposterous, the book at hand yields

itself to such interpretation. While the United States is readily identified with such clichés as a “protean nation,” or a “country of continuous change,” its history displays distinct developmental trends.

The beginning colonial status was followed by independence, the achievement of nationhood, the entrance into the ranks of colonial powers, and the elevation to superpower level. While retracing these steps Sellers, McMillen, and May’s work searches for the roots of change. Despite the authors’ warning against the trap of periodization and their emphasis on the continuity of the historical process the different stages of American history offer an explanation for the above changes.

The authors assert that America’s break from colonial status was facilitated by the beneficial effects of the Navigation Acts, the whiggism-driven political regeneration of the colonies, the British practice of “salutary neglect,” and the notion of British constitutionalism. Furthermore, a budding national identity, and traces of common thinking, thereby national self-identification existed in the pre-revolutionary period (52). While the American nation was forged in two wars of independence: the American Revolution and War of Independence (1775—1783) and the War of 1812 (1812—1814), the authors underestimate the role of the Constitutional Convention. The American Industrial Revolution, and political and economic unity achieved through the Civil War and the Reconstruction paved the way toward the American Empire culminating in the achievement of superpower status after 1945.

The book also highlights the changes of the American character, searching for the answer to Crèvecoeur’s question, “What then is the American, this new man?” The colonized American is personified by the French traveller’s “American Farmer” as a product of the melting pot, “a new race of men,” whose ethnicity-driven cultural and political preferences give way to economic and cultural independence buttressed by an optimistic interpretation of the ideas of the Enlightenment. Benjamin Franklin, the wizened statesman preferring “mobility over nobility” embodies the American as a political actor in

the pre-revolutionary period. James Madison, whose careful research of the political heritage of the Western and Eastern Hemisphere culminated in his leading role at the Constitutional Convention, is the embodiment of America's intellectual independence. Alexander Hamilton's aggressive economic and John Marshall's consistent judicial nationalism represent America at the threshold of nationhood. Lincoln's recognition of the "house divided" not only symbolizes the nation tormented by the dilemma of slavery, but functions as the personification of the national will during the turbulence of the Civil War. Theodore Roosevelt is the visionary president whose conviction and aggressive belief in the New Manifest Destiny laid the foundation of the American Empire. In the twentieth century Woodrow Wilson's missionary zeal and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's healing power enhanced the American ideal. Following the achievement of superpower status in the post 1945 era, John F. Kennedy's reach for the New Frontier personified the confident American whose bearings were shaken during the following decades and were not regained until Ronald Reagan's optimism-driven presidency.

Although this approach is susceptible to the trap of the now virtually discredited "top to bottom view" of history, the fact is that no other nation expects its leader to function as opinion maker and barometer of the contemporary social climate to an extent demonstrated by American history. As Skotheim argues no historian operates in a vacuum as his or her work is influenced by the "climate of opinion: the fundamental assumptions and attitudes shared by significant elements of the population at a given time." Sellers, McMillen, and May's work seems to have been unaffected by the notion of multiculturalism, the dominant cultural trend of the 1990's promoting equal recognition for all cultures comprising America's ethnic tapestry. Consequently, the achievements of non-white Americans are relegated to a side-show in this Anglo history dominated narrative.

The book, originally written for the lay or undergraduate public in the U.S., provides an extended outline of American history without

offering profound explanations. As for the Hungarian version, in addition to the accurate translation, the Hungarian explanations of English historical terms are the most valuable. Sellers, McMillen, and May's work achieves its original purpose, the illumination of the process during which the U.S. assumed superpower status. Furthermore, by describing the tumultuous growth of the American democracy Hahner's translation goes a long way in fighting popularly held myths, including the romance surrounding the cowboy and the notion of a solitary, Edison-like inventor propelling the American Industrial Revolution from his workshop.

Unfortunately the volume contains some debatable information as well. While 1619 is indicated as the beginning of slavery in America (19), the infamous Dutch "man o'war" only brought indentured laborers from the Black Continent. The Civil War, a milestone in American history for eliminating slavery, discrediting the states' rights movement, reaffirming the country's political and economic unity, and proving the viability of the Constitution, is branded as a "failure" (198). The Reconstruction, best interpreted by Eric Foner as an "unfinished revolution" is presented as a "tragedy" (197). Furthermore, the work favoring violence over individuality, egalitarianism, and self-reliance as the greatest legacy of the West (217) offers a differing interpretation of Turner's frontier thesis. The authors' estimate of the death toll of World War Two at one million is incorrect compared to the actual figures of 294,000 combat related and 119,000 other deaths noted in George B. Tindall and David F. Shi's *America*.

The publisher is also remiss with information concerning the authors. Charles G. Sellers is a noted historian researching Jacksonian America and issues of historiography. Henry F. May's studies of American intellectual history yielded such works as *The Enlightenment in America* (1958), and *The End of American Innocence. A Study of the First Years of Our Time 1912—1917* (1964).

Despite the above shortcomings Hahner's tremendous effort transforming an academic terms-laden, esoteric material into a readable, and at places enjoyable Hungarian text is commendable. The *Az Egyesült Államok Története* offering a glimpse into the tortuous evolution of American democracy not only serves as a catalyst to further study, but invokes the spirit of Colin Goodykoontz arguing that "history has the power along with religion, philosophy, literature, and the arts, to lift the spirit of man as it were to a mountain top from which he can more clearly take his bearings in a time of change and confusion." This book published in a country undergoing its own growing pains of democracy can hardly offer a better consolation to readers mired in the struggle for the realization of the Hungarian Dream.

